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Résumé Politics:
How Campaigns Use Background Appeals to Win Votes and Elections

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Résumé Politics:
How Campaigns Use Background Appeals to Win Votes and Elections

by

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Dedication

To Alice & Peter Arbour, and Carter Long

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My brother Blake has always been one of the warmest, most generous people in my life. His infectious and positive spirit is an always welcome part of my life. My sister Megan is not only my blood relation, but one of my closest friends, and is one of the first

people I turn to for advice and support in tough times. Her husband Wes is an outstanding addition to our family.

In this dissertation, I argue that information about the past is used to make decisions about the future. In dedicating this dissertation, I take a similar spirit. My parents, Peter and Alice Arbour, represent information from the past. They have taught me lessons about how to be generous, outgoing, caring, and committed to my values. They have supported me in hundreds of ways, physically, financially, socially, and emotionally. Representing decisions about the future, I include my nephew and godson Carter Long. Carter not only provides me with hope for the possibilities in his future, but he teaches me lessons today about the true meaning of joy. More importantly, he is the coolest person I know, just because he is who he is.

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Résumé Politics:
How Campaigns Use Background Appeals to Win Votes and Elections

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The dissertation examines the use of background appeals in campaign messages. I argue that background appeals allow campaigns to meet two seemingly conflicting incentives in the same message—the incentive to reduce voters' uncertainty about their candidate, and the incentive to remain ambiguous in their issue positions. Background appeals allow voters to know more about a candidate and develop more certainty about what he will do in office. At the same times, campaigns can achieve this goal while avoiding specific policy commitments, which, on controversial issues, might repel a significant part of the electorate.

I test my argument by examining how campaigns plan on using candidates' backgrounds by interviewing a sample of political consultants. The consultants I interviewed make the candidate's background a top priority in developing a message plan for their clients. They want to show voters "who their candidate is" as a means of developing likeability and credibility with voters.

As expected, campaigns use background appeals frequently, in nearly 80% of advertisements aired by US Senate campaigns in 2000 and 2002. But in these appeals, campaigns avoid specifically connecting their candidate to particular policies. Also, the appeal of ambiguity is so great that campaigns only use more specific background appeals when discussing the opponent's background.

Background appeals can have a positive effect on perceptions of a candidate. Using an experimental design, I vary the background of a mock candidate for Congress while holding constant his issue position. Respondents regard the candidate more favorably when they learn about his occupation than when they receive no such information.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Background on Background

> The question is, we face a lot of dangers in the world and, in the gentleman's words, we face a lot of evil men and what in my background equips me to deal with evil and bad men."
>
> Hillary Clinton, Davenport, IA, January 28, 2007

When Hillary Clinton made her first trip to Iowa as a presidential candidate in January 2007, her campaign held a series of town meetings across the state, allowing voters to ask questions of the senator. In the most newsworthy, Sen. Clinton was asked how her background prepared her to deal with the "evil" and "bad" men that threaten American security. Clinton's response, in which she raised her eyebrow while repeating the question, drew laughter and applause from her sympathetic audience, and newspaper headlines trying to figure out which particular men Sen. Clinton thought of as "evil" (Kornbluth & Balz 2007).

News coverage of this incident focused on the answer, but my dissertation focuses instead on the question, and the voter's rationale for asking it. He is uncertain about what challenges will face the President in the upcoming term in office. So in order to understand what this potential president might do in the future, this voter wanted to know about her past.

The Clinton campaign was just as eager to tell voters about her background. During her Iowa campaign swing, Sen. Clinton frequently dropped "nuggets from her personal biography—comparing her high school in Illinois to ones she visited in Iowa and casually referring to her husband as 'this guy from Arkansas'—into lengthy and detailed discourses about public policy" (Kornbluth & Balz 2007, A4).

My dissertation argues that the question asked of Sen. Clinton is unsurprising, and the desire of the Clinton campaign to discuss their candidate's past is not unusual. The

background of a candidate is central to the messages that political campaigns want to transmit to voters. As I will show, the background of the candidate is the primary factor that campaign strategists use in crafting a message for political campaigns. A look at the other 2008 presidential campaigns shows they have already employed their candidates' backgrounds to woo voters.

Many are highlighting favorable elements of their candidate's background. Before running in 2000, Sen. John McCain authored *Faith of our Fathers*, a book that emphasized his suffering as a POW during the Vietnam War and his connection to his father and grandfather, both professional soldiers. The 2008 McCain campaign is expected to argue that his Vietnam experience prepared him to deal with the modern-day war on terror. The Rudy Giuliani campaign can offer a more direct link to the war on terror, by discussing his role as New York mayor during the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center. In announcing his run for the Presidency on the *Hannity and Colmes* program on February 5, 2008, Giuliani said "I'm as ready as anybody could be" to handle a crisis as President because "I've lived through crises. September 11 is obviously the biggest one that I've lived through" (Hannity & Colmes 2007). The campaign for Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney put out the cycle's first television advertisement, which, not surprisingly, featured their candidate's background. The ad begins with wife Anne Romney saying, "Every place that Mitt has been, he has solved problems that people said were nearly impossible." A narrator follows to say, "Mitt Romney. Business legend. Rescued the Olympics..." (MittRomney.com).

Democratic campaigns are just as eager to tell voters about the past. In many ways, the engine of the Barack Obama campaign is his unique personal story, which he described the memoir *Dreams from my Father*, written before he began his political career. One sympathetic columnist has already stated that "[a] rational person could make

the case that Obama's background makes him the perfect candidate for president of the United States in these troubled times" (Kadner 2007).

Obama and McCain are not the only candidates who have taken pen (or keyboard, or ghostwriter's keyboard) in hand to write a book describing their experiences and thoughts. In fact,"[a]ll the leading candidates in the 2008 race for president have published (often with the help of a professional writer or editor) at least one book, and most of the would-be candidates waiting in the wings — from Al Gore to Fred Thompson to Newt Gingrich — are published authors as well." Michiko Kakutani, the book reviewer for the *New York Times*, argues that books by candidates can tell voters a great deal about candidates (2007, 2-2):

> *These are the sorts of personal tidbits a reader can find in books by these presidential candidates, along with lots of policy recommendations, boasts, platitudes, spin, the occasional mea culpa and yards and yards of self-promotion. Most books by politicians are, at bottom, acts of salesmanship: efforts to persuade, beguile or impress the reader, efforts to rationalize past misdeeds and inoculate the author against future accusations. And yet beneath the sales pitch are clues — in the author's voice, use of language, stylistic tics and self-presentation — that provide some genuine glimpses of the personalities behind the public personas. In short, when candidates decide to publish, they can still run, but they can't hide — at least not entirely.*

Here we have different campaigns, featuring candidates of disparate backgrounds and accomplishments, and even different party primary electorates. Yet their campaign messages have one unifying thread—a focus on the background of the candidate as a means of showing us "genuine glimpses" of the candidate. Each campaign wants to tell voters about the candidate's past in an effort to put their candidate in office in the future. This focus comes in an election cycle in which one may expect less background appeals in other years. The lack of governmental service by some of the major candidates prompted a *New York Times* article to ask "how much does experience matter now in presidential politics" (Lizza 2007, D1).

I argue that campaigns use background appeals—which I define as information in a campaign communication that discusses a candidate's biography, his accomplishments in the private sector, or her actions in public office—with great frequency. Campaigns do so because background appeals allow them to meet their imperative to increase certainty among votes about the issue agenda that their candidate would pursue if elected to office. Background information serves to let voters know "who your candidate is," as political consultants argue, allowing voters to give more credence to a campaign message and place more trust in the agenda the candidate intends to pursue in office.

Background appeals provide another advantage, allowing campaigns to be ambiguous at the same time that they build certainty. A counter-example demonstrates the point. Among the Democratic candidates for President, John Edwards has the thinnest record in public service, having served only one term in the Senate without developing a major legislative record. Instead of selling voters on his sincerity through discussions of his past accomplishments, he is left to argue that "it's time to move past these incremental steps, these baby steps, and have real and serious transformational change on some of the issues that we've talked about today" (cbsnews.com, 2007). Edwards was the first candidate to release a detailed health care proposal.[1] One reason why other campaigns have yet to release their own detailed proposal (on health care or any other issue) is that these campaigns can use their candidate's background to reduce voter uncertainty, giving them more freedom to maintain ambiguity by avoiding specific policy commitments.

That so many disparate campaigns have focused on their candidate's background demonstrates the importance that political practitioners place on such appeals. Political

[1] Of course, the Edwards campaign does have one element of their candidate's background—his blue collar childhood as the son of a mill worker. A Lexis-Nexis search shows 219 articles have discussed" John Edwards" and "mill worker" or "millworker" since he declared his candidacy in December 2006.

scientists have not placed a similar emphasis on the role of candidate background in campaign messages. Instead, scholars have primarily understood campaigns through the issue positions that campaigns highlight. This dissertation expands on these previous works by demonstrating the importance that campaigns place on background in planning and executing campaign messages. This works stands as an argument to include background in scholarly models of campaign issue agendas and strategy. A handful of studies have examined background have examined the use of background in political campaigns, findings that campaigns frequently incorporate background into their messages (Shyles 1984; Sellers 1998), and campaigns benefit when they highlight background (McDermott 1999, 2005; Sellers 1998). In this dissertation, I expand upon these previous works primarily by developing an argument for why campaigns favor background appeals, and why campaigns choose to combine issue and trait appeals with background information. I also measure the frequency and the specificity of background appeals, to determine if campaigns employ them in a manner consistent with my argument.

STUDYING CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

In examining the use of background appeals in contemporary campaigns, my dissertation focuses on the content of campaign messages. I study the use of background appeals in campaign messages by interviewing political consultants who create and develop such messages, studying the texts of television advertisements aired by political campaigns, and assessing the effect of background appeals on perceptions of the candidates. Naturally, this work builds upon previous studies on campaigns by political scientists. Yet despite the long series of books and articles that discuss the American

election process, relatively little attention has been given to explaining what political campaigns say and why they say it.

Campaigns and elections research has focused heavily not on what campaigns say, but on the effect campaigns have on the decisions made by voters. The most developed theories in the field explain the behavior of voters, and, in particular, their reaction to the information environment. Scholars have determined that elements of a voter's psychological and sociological makeup, such as latent preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1948, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee 1954) and party identification (Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1966; Lodge and Hamill 1986) have great power in explaining vote choice. Scholars argue that factors such as retrospective evaluations of the incumbent's performance (Fiorina 1978) and economic conditions (Kiewiet 1983), as well as familiarity with the candidates (Jacobson 1990; 2004) influence voter decisions. Others have developed models of the decision-making process for voters, explaining how awareness and acceptance of the elite debate shapes individual opinions (Zaller 1992), or how voters use a series of information shortcuts to vote correctly despite paying little attention to politics (Popkin 1991; Lau & Redlawsk 1997).

While these seminal works add greatly to our understanding of how voters process campaign information, they provide little insight into what political campaigns say and why they say it.[2] Instead, their focus is on the ability of voters to understand and

[2] The best explanation for the focus on voters among scholars of American elections is data availability. The development of survey research methods in the 1940s and 1950s, and the availability of datasets such as the American National Election Survey, has made the thoughts and ideas of voters, as expressed in answers to poll questions, readily available to political scientists and other scholars.

Data problems have hampered the ability of scholars to study campaign messages. For the study of campaigns themselves, the best data (and thus the best theories) revolve around candidate entry and campaign spending (Jacobson 1978; 1990; 2004; Jacobson & Kernell 1983; Green & Krasno 1988). Until recently, there were no archives that systematically recorded the content and the airing schedule of television advertisements. No such archive exists for direct mail pieces, radio advertisements, or any other form of campaign communications, though a recent project has tried to collect and code direct mail pieces from one election (Hillygus & Monson 2006).

sort through political information. In these works, as well as most others in the election literature, campaign messages are an independent variable.

Certainly, the scholarly literature has not completely ignored questions about the behavior of political campaigns.[3] But studies of campaign behavior have tended to avoid examining what campaigns say, focusing instead on how much campaigns do things, such as spend money (Ansolabehere & Gerber 1994; Jacobson 1978; 1990; 2004) or visit a state (Shaw 1999; 2006). Others have focused on how voters react to these and other major campaign events (Hillygus & Jackman 2003; Holbrook 1996). These previous works show that campaigns themselves can and do have an effect on election results, and each concludes that (relatively) more activity leads to more votes. But none are capable of judging the effectiveness of the message of a television advertisement, at a rally in a battleground state, or in the acceptance speech at their party's nominating convention.

As a result, our knowledge of campaign messages is quite limited. Scholarly knowledge is particularly bereft in the study of campaign advertising in congressional elections. In fact, the two most popular (and comprehensive) textbooks on congressional elections—Gary Jacobson's *The Politics of Congressional Elections* and Paul Herrnson's *Congressional Elections*—contain few, if any, citations to books or articles about the content of campaign messages.[4] And none of their citations are to works that use the campaign messages as a dependent variable. Most of the information these authors

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[3] The convention in political science is to describe the strategic and tactical decisions made by the group of people working together to win an election as being made by the "candidate." I do not use this convention, and instead will describe such actions as being made by the "campaign."

I have a very simple reason for not using candidate to describe such actions—it is empirically inaccurate. Modern day political campaigns are a collective affair, which include a set of political professionals who serve roles as both consultants and as full time staffers. Often, the candidate's spouse, parents, and children, as well as their close friends and political allies, participate in the campaign decision making process. Decisions are collaborative. Thus, I argue that this convention gives too much credit to the candidate's role, and not enough to the vital, and possibly determinative role, that others play in this process.

[4] For instance, the "Television Advertising" in the "Campaign Communications" chapter of Herrnson's book does not cite any books, journal articles, or book chapters written by political scientists or communications studies scholars in discussing the content of campaign advertisements.

provide about the content of campaign advertising are stories of particular advertisements that the authors find either notable or typical.

This is not to say that political science has entirely ignored the issue of what campaigns should say. Two major works have addressed this question. Most prominent is *An Economic Theory of Democracy* by Anthony Downs, which develops the spatial model of elections. Key to this model is how campaigns "formulate policies" (28) to position themselves along an ideological spectrum.[5] Voters then select the candidate whose issue position is closest to their own.

Famously, the spatial model predicts that when there are two campaigns, their issue positions will converge at the median voter. Of course, this empirical prediction is often incorrect. Downs knew this, and spends most of the book trying to identify why political campaigns, despite their incentives for convergence, have divergent issue positions. The key for Downs is uncertainty, which he defines as "any lack of sure knowledge about past, present, future, or hypothetical events" (77). When voters do not believe that a candidates "statements at the beginning of an election period can be used to make accurate predictions of [her] behavior," they are uncertain, and will "in the future ignore all [of a candidate's] statements" (105, 106). If, at the beginning of a campaign, the issue positions of a political candidate are not the same as the median voter, the candidate should benefit by moving toward the media voter. But if moving toward the median voter leaves voters uncertain about the true position of the candidate, they may discount the benefits they believe they will receive from that candidate. Thus, when voters have little confidence in what a candidate will do in office, they are less likely to choose that candidate (cf Hinich & Munger 1997, Ch. 6 for a more concentrated explanation). Subsequent studies provide empirical evidence for Downs' uncertainty

[5] Downs (1957) assumes that the ideological spectrum represented perceptions of the size of government.

hypothesis. When voters are uncertain about the issue positions or traits of a candidate, they are less likely to vote for her (Alvarez 1997; Glasgow & Alvarez 2000; McGraw, Hasecke, & Conger 2003).

Downs also argues that "the more information a decision-maker acquires, the more confident of making the right decision he becomes. And the more confident he is, the less he must discount the gains" received from selecting a favored candidate. Again, empirical results show that campaigns benefit from providing information to reduce voter uncertainty. When campaigns emphasize their candidate's issue positions, they reduce uncertainty and win more votes (Franklin 1991). To reduce uncertainty among voters, campaigns should highlight their candidate's policy proposals and issue positions.

The conclusion from Downs and those who study uncertainty in campaigns contrasts with the second perspective, which says that campaigns benefit from avoiding issue discussions and policy specifics. Benjamin Page's *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections* studies the rhetoric of presidential candidates, and finds that they are "skilled at appearing to say much while actually saying very little" (1978, 152). Campaigns and candidates say so little to voters because of their incentive for ambiguity. By taking clear, defined positions, campaigns risk alienating those who support the opposite position. In response, campaigns should avoid issues of a divisive sort," but instead "devote all [their] time, money, and energy to matters of consensus" (Page 1976, 749).

Both Downs and Page present broad explanations for what political campaigns should say, and why they should say it. Quite naturally, the empirical scope of these two works is limited. In Downs's case, there is no empirical scope; his work is formal theory, developing expectations that can be tested with empirical data. Page's work is empirical, but focuses on speeches by major party presidential nominees in 1968, 1972, and 1976.

One would expect that other scholars would follow these two works in identifying what campaigns say in an effort to reduce voter uncertainty and to maintain flexibility by being ambiguous.[6] Unfortunately, this expectation has not been met.

My dissertation attempts to contribute to the literature on campaign messages, and to explain how the incentives faced by political campaigns influence what campaigns can credibly say in their attempts to woo voters. In particular, I further develop the ideas of Downs and Page about campaign messages, and the seeming conflict between their two perspectives. As discussed, Downs finds that campaigns need to reduce uncertainty among voters about what their candidate will do if elected to office. Page argues that campaigns benefit by remaining ambiguous in their issue positioning.

In this dissertation, I argue that the most common way for campaigns to resolve the seeming conflict between their need to promote certainty and ambiguity is by discussing the background of their candidate. By doing so, a campaign help voters understand "who the candidate is," which campaigns believe will increase their candidate's credibility with voters and increase certainty. By discussing their candidate's background, a campaign can increase certainty about their candidate without resorting to advocating specific policy positions. Thus, a campaign can maintain its incentive for ambiguity.

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[6] To be fair, a significant literature has developed to empirically examine two elements of the spatial model—where do campaigns position themselves on the ideological spectrum (Ansolabehere, Snyder, & Stewart 2002; Burden 2004) and whether campaigns converge in their issue agenda (Kaplan, Park, & Ridout 2006; Simon 2002; Sigelman & Buell 2004; Spiliotes & Vavreck 2002).

The positioning literature examines answers to questionnaires, and does not address the content of messages that were transmitted to the public. As I discuss below, the convergence literature does not address the role of candidate background in issue selection or candidate messages.

STUDYING BACKGROUND

While the behavior of campaigns has never attracted as much scholarly attention as the behavior of voters, the availability of more developed datasets on campaign advertising has led to a recent upsurge in such studies. While these various works have examined different questions about campaign messages, they are unified in their focus on the issues that campaigns discuss, and pay almost no attention to the role that candidate background plays in message development.

One set of these works approached issue agendas from the Downsian standpoint, testing the hypothesis that campaigns should "converge" to talk about the same issues (Kaplan, Park, & Ridout 2006; Sigelman & Buell 2004; Simon 2002; Spiliotes & Vavreck 2002). These works examine a variety of factors that might affect the issue choices of campaigns and create divergence in issue usage between competing campaigns, including the ideology of the constituency, issues "owned" by the two major parties, the competitiveness of the race, and the amount of money spent by the opposing campaigns. None, though, include the background of the candidate as a factor that might constrain the ability of campaigns to discuss particular issues.

A second set of works studies the issue agendas of political campaigns. This perspective does not presume that the interaction between opposing campaigns has a particular effect on issue choices, like the convergence studies do. The issue agenda literature finds that local issue priorities (Sulkin & Evans 2006) or the major contentious issues facing Congress (Brasher 2003) most affect what campaigns say to voters. Hillygus & Shields (2006) argue that presidential campaigns can highlight "wedge issues" as an effective means to win the support of cross-pressured independents and opposing party members. Each of these works assumes that campaigns profit not by changing their issue positions to match voter preferences, but by emphasizing issues on

which they have the advantage and downplaying more problematic ones. Thus, campaigns succeed not by positioning themselves successfully (as the Downsian perspective assumes), but by winning control of the issue agenda.

From this perspective, issues can have different effects for different candidates. For instance, the national political parties have long-standing advantages on particular issues (Petrocik 1996), and particular campaigns should therefore have an advantage when they highlight issues their party owns. Despite this, evidence shows that campaigns are willing to trespass into the other party's issues (Norpoth & Buchanan 1992). Campaigns choose to trespass primarily because they are "riding the wave" of voter focus on the most salient national issues (Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994). Even when discussing an issue owned by the opposing party, a campaign is most likely to employ rhetoric on that issue that touches on traditional themes for their party (Sides 2006).

None of these works, unfortunately, address the influence that the background of the candidate has on the selection of issues or campaign themes.[7] The lack of attention given to background in these studies is surprising, given the importance of background information in campaign messages. Presidential campaigns make "experience images"—which focus on past jobs, political positions, or accomplishments—the most commonly used personal trait in television advertisements (Shyles 1984). And nearly half of the campaign literature examined in one study included the candidate's occupation (McDermott 1999). Background information is not only common in political campaigns, but also is quite effective as a campaign tool. Even the appearance of a candidate's occupational title on a ballot helps to win votes (McDermott 2005).

[7] The notable exception here is Sides (2006). He includes a variable for "record," which he borrows from Sellers (1998). The variable, which measures whether the candidate's work on a particular issue is mentioned in her entry in the that year's *Almanac of American Politics*, is a significant predictor of campaign issue agenda for five out of nine issues, as much as any variable in the model.

Sellers (1998) provides the most detailed analysis of the role that political record plays in campaigns. He finds that when a candidate has built a favorable political record on an issue, her campaign is more likely to highlight that issue. Further, Sellers finds that "[c]andidates win more favorable evaluations is they focus on their records" (170). Thus, what research has been done on background appeals finds that campaigns use background appeals frequently, and benefit when they do so.

I expand on these studies in several ways. First, I explain why background appeals provide a particular benefit for campaigns. Chapter 2 spells out my argument that background information allows campaigns to meet two seemingly conflicting incentives—the incentive to reduce voters' uncertainty about their candidate, and the incentive to remain ambiguous in their issue positions.

Second, I present evidence that demonstrates the importance of background as a component of campaign message strategy. In Chapter 3, I interview a series of political consultants involved in creating and developing campaign message strategies. They consider candidate background to be of at least equal importance to the national issue agenda and district demography in determining what their campaigns will say. Consultants argue that highlighting the background of their candidates is a necessary condition to get voters to listen and believe the issue stands of their candidate. In Chapter 4, I measure how common background appeals are through an analysis of the texts of campaign advertisements.[8] This appeals are nearly ubiquitous (in nearly 80% of all ads broadcast) in contemporary political campaigns. In addition, Chapter 4 also examines the level of specificity of background appeals, and finds that campaigns embrace their

[8] This is one place where my work provide insights that Sellers (1998) couldn't. Because data on campaign communication were not available to him. Sellers (1998) could not directly measure campaign content. His measures for issue content are indirect. Instead, he uses two sources, "a list of issues mentioned by respondents [to the 1988 National Election Study] as frequently discussed in the recent election campaign" and a list in the 1988 Senate Election study of the "issues emphasized by Senate candidates that year" (both from 161).

incentive for ambiguity, providing specific policy information to voters only when discussing their opponent's background.

I also examine the direct effect of background appeals through an experimental design, which allows me to compare the value of a background appeal against an appeal that does not mention a candidate's background. In Chapter 5, I report the results of an experiment, in which I varied the occupational background of a mock candidate while holding constant the policy content of a campaign message. Voters regard the candidate more favorably when they learn of his occupation.

My argument here is not that issues are unimportant in political campaigns. To do so would be to overlook mounds of evidence that show the important role that issues play in campaign strategy and voter decision making (cf Wright & Berkman 1986; Highton 2004). But the short shrift given to the role of background in political campaigns means that our understanding of how issues work is incomplete. Campaigns must sell voters on both the personal characteristics of their candidate, as demonstrated by their background, as well as their policy proposals. Political science researchers must study both the candidate's background and her issues positions in order to develop a complete understanding of the behavior of political campaigns.

BACKGROUND, CAMPAIGNS MESSAGES, AND DEMOCRACY

Studying the use of background appeals in campaign messages also has important implications for measuring the health of American democracy. In particular, the question of what issues campaigns emphasize, if they emphasize any at all, raises questions about the quality of representation.

The first is the amount of knowledge voters possess about the candidates and their policy proposals. The connection between public opinion and public policy is tenuous at

best if voters lack knowledge about what policies candidates intend to pursue in office. Questions about the amount of knowledge that voters possess and their ability to process the information that they receive to "vote correctly" have always been at the center of the study of political behavior. Studies about voter information have focused at the individual level, trying to determine how much information about politics voters possess and can process (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1997). My dissertation turns the focus onto campaigns, and the amount and the quality of information that they provide voters. Through background information, voters are able to get a good picture of the candidate's personality and priorities. On the other hand, campaigns provide little specific policy information in these appeals, retarding the ability of voters to predict the specific actions a candidate will take if elected.

That candidates do not have to commit to particular policy proposals during a campaign provides them flexibility when they enter office and attempt to represent their constituents. Officeholders, whose campaigns used background to reduce uncertainty among voters, rather than specific policy proposals, have not pre-committed to particular policy options. They are able to adapt to new information and changing circumstances. Representatives who have not made specific policy commitments can more easily seek compromise with other stake holders.

While flexibility in office might be good for an office-seeking politician, it can be worrisome to those worried about the accountability of elected officials. One element of accountability is that voters are expected to assess whether or not an office holders running for reelection lived up to the promises their campaign made in their previous electoral victory. But if campaigns avoid taking clear policy stands in the initial campaign, voters have little information to assess a candidate's fidelity to her campaign promises.

In addition to its impact upon incumbents and their constituents, the importance of "who a candidate" is affects the type of people who can consider challenging an incumbent or entering an open seat contest. If a candidate with a background that can credibly connect to the issues of the day and the people of a district enters a race (either as an incumbent or a challenger), her chances of winning are substantially greater than if a less a credible candidate enters. This is the central insight of the congressional elections literature. Incumbents should win most elections, but when a "quality challenger" enters, who has organizational support, fund raising capacity, name identification and the political skills to present their message to voters, a competitive race will develop (Jacobson & Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989, 1990, 2004). In addition to their organizational skills and familiarity, the centrality of the candidate to campaign messages indicates that we can add a credible message to the list of attributes "quality challengers" bring when they decide to run for office.

The need to credibly connect a candidate to issues also suggests that not all backgrounds would be regarded the same. Most times, the need to connect issues to a candidate's background suggests that, for example, those who have spent most of their life focused on personal goals, such as business advancement, will have a difficult time convincing voters of their dedication to societal problems; those with a greater focus on community service can more credibly connect that background to the various issues that might face a candidate for office. Background can also provide advantages to incumbent candidates. While in office, incumbents have dealt with (and often voted on, for legislative candidates) a whole host of issues, and their campaign can choose among the various actions to highlight those that are most salient that election cycle. Finally, since the issue interest of voters changes from election to election, so can the background

elements that are most effective in a particular election year, changing the type of candidates who would have the most success.

In this chapter, I have sketched out two important elements about background usage in modern day political campaigns. The first is that background appeals are important to campaigns. The second is that background appeals are an understudied part of an understudied element within political behavior. In this dissertation, I examine both the use of background appeals in political communication, and try to explain why these appeals hold so much sway for political campaigns.

Chapter 2: Why Campaigns Make Background Appeals

In Chapter 1, I began by discussing the importance of background appeals to the 2008 presidential campaigns. Despite a wide variety of biographical details and political records, campaigns in both parties have begun their effort to woo voters not by discussing their candidate's plans for the future. Instead, the campaigns have started by looking backwards to the candidate's past.

The political science literature shows that these campaigns should benefit electorally from such appeals. Sellers (1988) finds that when campaigns emphasize issues on which their candidate has built a positive reputation in their legislative win more votes. McDermott (2005) shows that even the mere appearance of a candidate's occupational title on the ballot helps campaigns secure more votes. A simple summary of these two works would be that background appeals work. What these studies do not address is the question of why background appeals work.

In this chapter, I take up this question. I argue that political campaigns favor background appeals because they provide them with a unique advance—the ability to be both specific and ambiguous in the same message. Campaigns have incentives for certainty and for ambiguity. Campaigns need to be specific in their appeals to increase certainty about their candidate (Downs 1957; Alvarez 1997). By referring to the background of their candidate, campaigns can make voters believe that their issue positions are rooted in a genuine desire to solve problems, and are not empty promises designed solely to win votes. At the same time, campaigns benefit by communicating ambiguous policy positions to voters. Ambiguous appeals allow campaigns to avoid alienating voters, to keep their opponents guessing, and to maintain policy flexibility for their candidate once elected to office (Shepsle 1972; Page 1976; Alesina & Cukierman

1990; Meirowitz 2005). Campaigns can use the biography or political record of their candidate to increase the credibility of an unspecific policy position in a campaign message. Thus, background appeals provide campaigns with an efficient way to meet both of these seemingly contradictory incentives.

The remainder of this chapter details my argument. I begin by examining the political science literature on uncertainty and the role it plays in determining vote choice. The next section addresses the literature on campaign messages and positioning, with a particular emphasis on the role of ambiguity. I continue by examining the conflict between reducing uncertainty and preserving ambiguity for political campaigns, explaining how background appeals allow campaigns to meet both of these incentives. I then follow with hypotheses, detailing when and how campaigns should discuss the background of their candidates in their message to voters.

UNCERTAINTY

When making their selections on election day, voters do not know what the future will bring if their candidate wins. Naturally, voters have some expectations about what the candidates will do if elected. Campaigns spend several months making sure of that, peppering likely voters with messages about what their candidate will do in office, and what their opponent might do as well. But despite the information targeted at them, voters come to the ballot box with at least some level uncertainty about the candidates before them.

When making prospective judgments, voters will consider their own confidence in the issue positions and promises made by each campaign. In this dissertation, I define this level of confidence as a voter's "certainty." An individual voter's certainty is determined by their belief that the information campaigns communicate to them

accurately reflect what the candidate will do if elected to office. If a voter thinks the promises made and issue positions taken during the campaign reflect what a candidate will do in office, she is more certain about that candidate. Conversely, if a voter does not believe the promises and positions of a campaign, she is uncertain.

Because voters cannot know with absolute certainty what the future will bring, they always have some level of uncertainty about candidates seeking office. Campaigns can contribute greatly to the uncertainty that voters have about what candidates might do in office. Campaigns can advocate issue positions that voters regard as different from previous issue positions taken by that candidate (Enelow & Hinich 1984). Also, campaigns may choose to be ambiguous in the information about their candidate that they present to voters (Shepsle 1972; Page 1976, 1978). Regardless of its source, voters do not like to be uncertain about a candidate. As Downs (1957) shows, voters have rational reasons for their displeasure. Campaigns have every incentive to position their candidate at the strategically optimal location. Once elected, the candidate-turned-office-holder is free to pursue her own sincere policy preferences, in spite of the issue positions presented to voters by her campaign. Voters, of course, do not want to be played for fools by the cheap talk of political campaigns, and are less favorable toward candidates when they think a candidate is saying one thing during a campaign but will do something else in office.

Formal models have found that uncertainty can have a substantial effect on the likelihood that an individual votes for their preferred candidate (Alvarez 1997, Ch. 3; Enelow & Hinich 1981; Hinich & Munger 1997, Ch. 6). These models build off the traditional Downsian perspective, beginning with the assumption that voters view themselves and the candidates on a single ideological dimension. The models assume that voters, however, view the candidate's position as a distribution over a series of points.

When a voter is certain about the true position of a candidate, the distribution is concentrated over a small area. But when the voter is not sure what a candidate will do if elected to office, the distribution is over a much large area. Mathematical modeling shows that voters will discount the benefits they believe they will receive from a candidate in proportion to their uncertainty about that candidate (Alvarez 1997, Ch. 3; Hinich & Munger 1997, Ch. 6).

Empirical evidence provides strong confirmation for the findings of these formal models. When voters are uncertain about the issue positions of a particular candidate, they will regard that candidate less favorably (McGraw, Hasecke, & Conger 2003). Similarly, when voters are uncertain of a candidate's traits, they reduce their evaluation of that candidate (Glasgow & Alvarez 2000). Regardless of whether a voter is uncertain about a candidate's issue positions, trait characteristics, or both, uncertain voters are less likely to vote for that candidate (Alvarez 1997). In fact, uncertainty can have a similar effect to issue distance in determining an individual's vote choice (Bartels 1986; Gill 2004).

As a result, campaigns have a strong incentive to emphasize the issue positions of their candidate in an effort to increase voter certainty. Franklin (1991) finds that campaigns can increase voters' perceptions of the clarity of their candidate's issue positions by emphasizing those issues. By emphasizing the sincere issue preferences of their candidates, campaigns can reduce voter uncertainty and win more votes on election day.

AMBIGUITY

The incentive for campaigns to hold one clear position to reduce voters' uncertainty about their candidate conflicts with another incentive—to remain ambiguous

in their issue stands (Shesple 1972; Page 1976, 1978; Enelow & Hinich 1981). There are several explanations for why ambiguity provides strategic and tactical advantages to candidates and campaigns.

First, campaigns do not want to offend voters by advocating an issue position at odds with the opinions of voters. Political campaigns tend to behave in a risk-averse manner, and usually align their messages with the majority of voters (Page 1978, Ch. 3). When there is not a majority on a salient issue, a campaign that takes a clear position on that issue risks alienating a significant number of potential voters who hold a different position (Shepsle 1972, 565). Similarly, when a campaign is unable to identify the position of the median voter, they have an incentive to "make their positions ambiguous rather than to specify them" (Glazer 1990, 238; Calvert 1985). In both of these cases, a campaign's "best strategy is to avoid issues of a divisive sort," placing no emphasis on such policy questions. Instead, the campaign should "devote all [their] time, money, and energy to matters of consensus" (Page 1976, 749).

Second, campaigns desire ambiguity because it provides them with strategic advantages over their opponent. Meirowitz (2005) shows that if one campaign announces their positions before the opponent, the opposing campaign can then select a dominant set of issue positions, and win the election. Moreover, even if the opposing campaign does not select the "dominant" issue position, a campaign that takes definitive issue positions early provides a clear target for their opponent to attack over the course of the campaign. Similarly, campaigns cruising to a landslide victory rarely discuss controversial issues in their messages to voters, to avoid providing fodder for opposition attacks (Kahn & Kenney 1998). Thus, another cause of ambiguity is the desire of campaigns to "keep their opponent guessing."

The third reason that campaigns remain ambiguous is to maintain flexibility in policy choices once their candidate takes office (Alesina & Cukierman 1990; Aragones & Neeman 2000). By transmitting ambiguous messages before she takes office, a campaign avoids committing their candidate to a particular policy once elected. Naturally, campaigns may wish to avoid discussing their candidate's plans if those plans conflict with the desires of voters. Ambiguous campaign messages allow a candidate to delay announcing their unpopular decision until after having won office. Also, by avoiding promises during an initial campaign, the candidate-turned-office-holder cannot be accused of breaking them during a subsequent campaign for re-election.

For all of these reasons, campaigns are loathe to be specific in their issue positions during a campaign. In his 1978 book *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections*, Benjamin Page described the frequency of ambiguity in presidential campaign rhetoric (152-152):

> *Indeed, the most striking feature of candidates' rhetoric about policy is its extreme vagueness. The typical campaign speech says virtually nothing specific about policy alternatives; discussions of the issue are hidden away in little-publicized statements and position papers. Even the most extended discussions leave many questions unanswered. In short, policy stands are infrequent, inconspicuous, and unspecific. Presidential candidates are skilled at appearing to say much while actually saying little.*

Page (1978, 152-191) then describes the skill with which presidential candidates of the late 1960s and 1970s avoided taking specific stands while making statements of seemingly great import. When these candidates did discuss their stands on the issues of the day, candidates are rarely fully specific. Page writes, "In these respects—intention, timing, direction, and magnitude—candidates' proposals almost always fall far short of clarity" (163-64).

Sides (2006) and Arbour (2005) show that ambiguity is alive and well. Today's campaigns for the US House and Senate are just as skilled in avoiding specifics in their

television advertisements as the presidential campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s were in the speeches studied by Page. Both formal models and empirical studies demonstrate that campaigns are quite successful at avoiding specific policy commitments in the messages they transmit to voters.

BACKGROUND APPEALS AS A SOLUTION TO THESE CONFLICTING INCENTIVES

Thus, the political science literature suggests that campaigns have an incentive to take clear issue positions in order to reduce voters' uncertainty about what their candidate will do once in office. The literature also suggests that campaigns also have an incentive to remain ambiguous in their issue positioning, which increases their chances on election day. The question for campaign strategists is how to resolve this seeming conflict.

I argue that emphasizing the background of a political candidate helps achieve both of these goals. Background appeals suggest to voters that a candidate's attention to the issue is not just demagogic rhetoric, but a reflection of a genuine commitment to solving problems. Thus, voters use retrospective information to reduce their prospective uncertainty about a candidate. Campaigns can use background information, rather than policy commitment, as their method to increase voter certainty. Background appeals are the preferred method of developing certainty because they allow campaigns to retain their incentive for ambiguity.

At this time, it is important to clarify what I mean by a "background appeal." A background appeal is any portion of a campaign message that includes a reference to the biography, occupation, or political record of one of the candidates for office. The messages under study here tend to focus on two areas of candidates' backgrounds. The first is the candidate's biography, including information on her parents and grandparents, details of her upbringing, her educational background, and family. The second common

type of background appeal includes the political record of the candidate, focusing on votes taken in legislative office and actions taken in executive office. Campaigns can—and often do—combine information about a candidate's background with policy information. For example, a campaign could discuss how a hardship that a candidate faced while growing up, or a lesson imparted by a parent, taught the candidate lessons and commitments that she will carry into public office. Or, a background appeal might discuss how a candidate voted in the past on an important issue in the current campaign, implying she will vote that way again in the future.

Voters are skeptical about the appeals made and issue positions taken during campaigns. The default position for voters is to believe that campaign rhetoric is nothing but hot air and cheap talk (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2003). A campaign strategist must first overcome this skepticism and make their candidate seem credible to voters. Background appeals provide campaigns with a method to achieve this goal, because a message based on a candidate's record or biography suggests to voters a commitment to particular policy positions during their term in office.

Downs (1957, 107-109) shows that voters have rational reasons to examine a candidate's past in an effort to reduce their uncertainty about the future. Voters seek reliable candidates, whose "policy statements at the beginning of an election period…can be used to make accurate predictions of its behavior…during the period" that she holds office; voters "must be able to predict their actions reasonably well from what [candidates] say" (Downs 1957, 105, 107). The best way for candidates to demonstrate their reliability is through integrity—their campaign pledges must match their actions in office—because "integrity is by far the most efficient form of reliability" (Downs 1957, 108). While voters certainly care about the positions of the candidates, they also care about the reliability of those positions.

Thus, focusing on the background of a candidate serves as a rational and effective strategy for political campaign. A background appeal suggests reliability and integrity to voters, implying that if a candidate has advocated a particular issue position in the past, they are likely to advocate that same issue position in the future. When a candidate's current issue position is connected to past action on that issue, the campaign message is more credible. The voter is now more likely to believe that the issue position is a more sincere reflection of the candidate's actual position. As a result, background appeals can increase a voter's level of certainty. In the absence of information about the candidate's background, a voter is more likely to believe that the issue position represented in a campaign advertisement is "cheap talk"—a promise designed only to win votes on election day, and to be forgotten once the candidate becomes an office holder.

Information about the biography and record of a political candidate can serve as a supplement a non-specific policy commitment presented in a campaign message. Bolstered by the background information, voters feel more certain about what the candidate will do once elected to office. Background appeals thus allow a campaign to take a position without actually taking a position. Rather than use policy commitments as the means to increase voter certainty, campaigns use background appeals for this purpose. By employing a background appeal, a campaign does not have to provide voters with specific information about what the candidate has done previously, or will do in the future.

For example, a campaign advertisement might say that an incumbent has "fought for good jobs in Washington." Such a message provides voters with an indication that the candidate cares about the issue of jobs because she has worked on this issue in her previous political work. A voter would understand the appeal to mean that the candidate will continue to care about finding jobs for her constituents, and will work on economic

development and job protection issues. At the same time, this message provides little actual information about what specific actions the candidate has taken in the past, or will take in the future. For campaigns, background appeals can provide the best of both worlds—satisfying voters' desire for certainty, as well as their own desire for ambiguity, in the same message.

Implicit in my argument so far is that background appeals require a level of credibility to increase voter certainty. Voters must believe that the background of a candidate is relevant to the world of politics, and to the office the candidate is seeking. In other words, not all backgrounds are the same politically. The level of a candidate's experience in elective office should play the greatest role in enhancing the credibility of a background appeal. Voters can more easily connect a candidate's background to what they will do in office when that candidate's experience is more proximate to the office sought. An incumbent's background is obviously most proximate to the office (exactly proximate, in fact), so voters should have the least difficulty using information about what that candidate has done in their previous terms in office to anticipate what she will do in her next term, should she win reelection. When a candidate has never held elective office, voters will struggle to make the connection between previous experiences and the job the candidate wants.

Another factor that should affect the likelihood of background usage is the difference in experience between the two candidates. A campaign whose candidate has experience has a valence advantage over their opponent (Stokes 1963). Voters can more easily connect their candidate's background to the job being sought. A campaign with a valence advantage should exploit it, discussing their candidate's background more frequently than the opposing campaign discusses their candidate's background. A campaign facing an experience disadvantage should be more likely to transmit negative

messages about their opponent's background. Not only does the background of a more experienced opponent provide a bigger target for attack, but by attacking, a campaign can reduce the valence advantage that experience provides their opponent.

Background is not the only way in which campaigns can increase their credibility and certainty with voters while avoiding specific policy commitments. Campaigns can make appeals based on partisanship and party symbols, in an attempt to connect their candidate to the party's credibility, accomplishments, stereotypes, and leaders. Similarly, campaigns can use testimonials and endorsements as a means of transferring credibility and authority from the spokesperson to their candidate. But both of these methods of increasing certainty about their candidate without policy commitments are less efficient and effective than making background appeals. Party appeals, for example, connect a candidate not only to the positive associations of the party, but also the negative ones. Further, partisan appeals should only work with your fellow partisans. Campaigns should therefore avoid such appeals in broad-based advertising unless a majority of the electorate identifies with their party. In that case, the campaign should win anyway, regardless of the quality of its advertising. Similarly, testimonials are attempts to transfer credibility as a means of building certainty, but there is no guarantee that individuals will make the link that a campaign intends.

The first section of this chapter has thus shown that background appeals should provide benefits to political campaigns, because they allow them to efficiently and elegantly reduce a voter's uncertainty about what they will do in office while continuing to make ambiguous appeals. I turn now to develop expectations derived from this literature. These hypotheses will provide me with an outline to test how well my arguments explain the use of background appeals on real world campaigns.

THE GOALS OF CAMPAIGNS AND VOTERS

Before turning to the specific hypotheses for this project, I begin by stating my assumptions about the goals of campaigns and voters, and how the interplay between these two goals affects campaign communications. I do so to give my broad perspective on how campaigns work, and to explain how these goals should affect the presentation of background information in campaign communication.

I start with the assumption that the goal of a campaign is to win the election. As a result, campaigns will seek to frame their presentation of their candidate's personality and biography, as well as her issue positions and trait characteristics, in the most favorable light possible. This assumption does not dismiss the possibility that campaign messages are policy motivated; it simply contends that whatever the motivation for the issues advocated by a campaign, the presentation will put the candidate in the most favorable light. Campaigns have choices about what information about their candidate to present to voters and about the visual and rhetorical devices they use to do so.

Voters have two important goals as recipients of campaign messages. First, voters want to learn information about the candidates, their issue positions, and their plans for office. Only through learning about the candidates can voters determine whose policy positions and trait characteristics will be most beneficial. While voters want this information, the second goal of voters is to receive this information as efficiently as possible. Voters have limited attention spans, in large part because they have better things to do with their time than learn about politicians. As a result, voters use a large number of information shortcuts in an effort to learn political information with a minimum of effort (Popkin 1991). Enelow & Hinich (1981, 489) argue that voters take the information they receive about candidates on various issues from various sources and "collapse candidate positions…into a position on the underlying ideological dimension."

The interaction between the goals of candidates and voters has important consequences for the content of campaign messages. Campaigns are well aware that voters have limited attention spans, and try to frame the information they present in an easily understandable way. Campaigns cannot relate their candidate's full and complete position to voters. Even if a campaign wanted to relate a full and specific position to the electorate, its efforts to do so would be stymied by voters themselves, who pay only sporadic attention to campaign messages. As a result, campaigns have a great deal of choice in what components of their candidate's position that they wish to relate to voters. Because campaigns are unable to relate their candidate's entire position to voters, they must decide which (if any) portions of the candidate's position to relate to voters.

Campaigns are well aware that voters have limited attention spans, and try to frame the information they present in an easily understandable way. Campaigns are looking for ways to quickly attract the attention of voters. I argue that scholars can therefore learn much from the content of political advertisements. These are the best data source on not only of what candidates think, but also how political consultants and campaign managers think they can be most effective at wooing voters.

I also make two more assumptions about specific forms of campaign communications. First, I assume that campaign messages are purposeful. Or, in simpler terms, campaigns mean to say what they say. Political campaigns spend a great deal of money on public opinion polling and research into both candidates' backgrounds and the demographic characteristics of their district. Having gathered all this information, campaign strategists then spend a great deal of time and effort to develop what they believe will be the ideal campaign message. For most professionalized campaigns, both of these processes take place well before the campaign begins any serious effort to communicate with voters (Faucheux 2002; Johnson 2001). My study of campaign

messages will examine the content of campaign messages at very minute levels. For my conclusions about the small details of campaign messages to be valid, campaigns need to have intended to mean what they say, even in the smallest details.[9] This first assumption allows me to make such conclusions.

The next assumption is that campaign communications—regardless of medium—are *tabulae rasae*. Meaning that, as a blank slate, a political campaign can fill a television ad, a radio spot, a direct mail piece, or a candidate speech however they see fit.[10] While there are well-known (and easily parodied) methods of delivering political messages, campaigns are under no obligation to do so. Campaigns have a wide variety of rhetorical and visual devices at their disposal to deliver messages to voters. That campaigns used well worn and easily parodied forms of communication indicates only that a large number of campaign operatives, over a diverse number of districts, candidates, and electoral contexts, find such forms advantageous in communicating their message to voters.

EXPECTATIONS

Now that I have explained these basic assumptions of the project, I now turn to my expectations that I develop from the literature discussed above. The expectations

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[9] I should note that candidates and campaign surrogates will make statements that are unplanned, and which can have an affect (positive or negative) on the outcome of a campaign. My definition of campaign message excludes such statements, as they are not part of a planned statement by campaigns. As a result, I do not study such statements as part of this dissertation.

[10] The one exception to this assumption are disclosure requirements. Campaigns are required to include in text a disclosure of who paid for the advertisement, and (in federal elections), the name of the treasurer of the campaign, party, or the committee sponsoring an independent expenditure. Since the implementation of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in the 2004 election cycle, television advertisements for federal races must include the candidate stating that he or she "approved this message." These disclosure requirements, though, take up such a small portion of any campaign communication that they have almost no effect on the overall message of that communication.

come in two formats. The first three are empirical observations. I am not measuring variation here; instead, I expect to find consistency across a variety of circumstances. The next three are more classical hypotheses, in which I attempt to explain variation in campaign advertising and voters' response to campaign messages.

The first empirical observation that I believe is consistent across a wide range of campaigns is that the background of a political candidate is a priority in developing a message plan. If appeals based on the biography and political record of a political candidate provide advantages to a campaign, then campaigns should be aware of these advantages, and seek to exploit them in the messages they send to voters. As a result, the biography and political record of a candidate should be a key component of campaign planning about their message, and campaigns should thus conduct a great deal of research into the background of both their candidate, and their opponent.

I examine this expectation in Chapter 3, where I interview a sample of political consultants. My sample includes media, direct mail, and general political consultants, as these types of consultants are involved in planning and executing campaign messages. My questions to these consultants probe what factors they consider when developing a message for their clients, and, in particular, the importance of the candidate's background in those decisions.

The second observation that I expect to find consistently across campaigns is the frequent use of background appeals in the messages that campaigns convey to voters. The logic for this expectation follows directly from the logic of the previous one. Background appeals allow campaigns to make appeals that voters use to feel more certain about what the candidate will do if elected to office while allowing the campaign to maintain an ambiguous message. If campaigns make the biography and political record a key component of their campaign strategy and message plan, then appeals based on the two

elements of a candidate's background should be common in the various advertisements, direct mail pieces, and speeches that campaigns produce. As a result, campaigns should make many of these appeals.

The key difference between this expectation and the previous one is in measurement. The first says that campaigns should focus on the background of the candidate while planning a campaign. Supportive or disconfirming evidence for the first expectation can thus be provided by asking those who plan campaign messages, which are primarily political consultants. The second expectations says that background appeals will be present in the product of campaign plans—actual campaign communication. To examine the second expectations, I code the most extensive database of campaign advertisements available at present date, which is from the Wisconsin Advertising Project. Chapter 4 will determine how often political campaigns discuss the background of candidates in these advertisements.

The previous expectation probes if campaigns use background appeals as a means of reducing uncertainty among voters. The third observation that I expect to find consistently across campaigns is the ability to preserve the goal of ambiguity through the use of background appeals. In particular, campaigns will not be specific when making background appeals. Here, I will measure the background appeals used in campaign advertisements to determine the level of specificity of the policy content as well as the level of specificity that campaigns use to connect candidates to these policies. Campaigns, having tried to improve voters' levels of certainty about their candidate, are now free to preserve their incentive for ambiguity. I contend that campaigns will do so by providing non-specific policy information to voters. The results that examine this expectation are also included in Chapter 4.

The assumption behind the three expectations detailed above is that campaigns, regardless of circumstance, behave in the same way. Not all campaigns are the same, and the differences between different candidates might affect the willingness and capability of their campaigns to transmit background appeals to voters. I develop three hypotheses to examine how different campaigns might employ appeals about their candidate's and their opponent's background.

The first hypothesis examines when campaigns will employ background appeals, holding that campaigns will employ more of these appeals when a candidate's experience is more proximate to the office sought. This hypothesis applies to both positive messages about the sponsoring candidate's background, and negative messages about the opposing candidate's background. Campaigns should use background appeals more when voters can most easily connect the candidate's background to the office sought. Without the connection between background and the office sought, a campaign cannot reduce uncertainty about their candidate. experience cannot make that connection as credibly as campaigns discussing the record of candidates with more extensive political experience. As a result, these campaigns should make fewer background appeals, and find other methods to make their candidate's issue positions credible to voters.

Campaigns should also employ background appeals more frequently when their candidate has more experience than their opponent. In such a circumstance, a campaign has a valence advantage, and should exploit that advantage. Also, campaigns should be more likely to discuss their opponent's background when at an experience disadvantage. A campaign needs to reduce the advantage that their opponent has in connecting with voters, and attacking their opponent's background, particularly their political record, is essential to this task. I will discuss these hypotheses in Chapter 4, again using television advertisements as my unit of analysis.

Despite the incentive for campaigns to be ambiguous in their issue stands, campaigns will, at times, provide specific issue information to voters. The next hypothesis examines when those times are. Research into the content of campaign messages has identified three contexts which might prompt a campaign to employ more specific messages. Challenging and open seat campaigns might be more specific in their background appeals, because voters are less familiar with their candidate, and thus are more uncertain about that candidate (Alvarez 1997; Bartels 1986; Koch 2003). Campaigns in competitive races might be forced to take more specific issue positions to enhance their credibility, while campaigns cruising to an easy electoral victory can emphasize more consensual themes (Kahn & Kenney 1998). Finally, campaigns might make more specific background appeals when discussing the opponent's background. Campaigns face a greater evidentiary barrier when presenting information about their opponent, as voters are more skeptical about negative claims (Geer 2006, 50-63; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002). To overcome this natural skepticism, messages about the opposing candidate need to be less ambiguous. Thus, this hypothesis holds that campaigns will be more specific in the messages they transmit to voters in three circumstances: *a.)* when the sponsoring candidate is not an incumbent, *b.)* when the election is close, and *c.)* when campaigns are broadcasting a negative message about their opponent. Chapter 4 also includes the results from this hypothesis, again using television advertisements as my universe.

The final hypothesis examines the effect of background appeals. This chapter has spelled out a logic for why background appeals should hold particular benefits for campaigns, and has explained why such appeals should be so common in political communication. At the heart of this logic is that background appeals have a particular appeal to voters, because they allow them to think they are more certain of what that

candidate will do once in office. To address this issue, I conduct an experiment, holding constant the issue position taken by the candidate, and varying the occupational background of a hypothetical congressional candidate. Respondents who read about a candidate with a relevant occupational background should regard the candidate more favorably than those respondents in the control group, who receive no information about the candidate's occupational background. I examine this hypothesis in Chapter 5, detailing the experiment procedure and examining the details of the manipulations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has put forth the argument that political campaigns should use background appeals frequently in the messages that they transmit to voters. I have sketched out the logic for this argument, noting that campaigns have particular advantages in making background appeals. These advantages are not present when campaigns make other types of appeals.

The next three chapters of this dissertation will examine this argument empirically. These chapters will examine how important background appeals are in the messages that campaigns send out to voters, and the effect of background appeals on voters' perceptions of the candidates themselves. The evidence presented in these chapters will demonstrate the strength, or weakness, of the argument presented here.

Chapter 3: You Are the Message: How Political Consultants Use Candidate Background

Roger Ailes argues that "when you communicate with someone, it's not just the words you choose to send to the other person that make up the message. You are also sending signals about what kind of person you are—by your eyes, your facial expression, etc. The words themselves are meaningless unless the rest of you is in synchronization. The total you affects how others feel about you and respond to you" (Ailes with Kraushar 1988, 20).

Ailes's perspective does not deny the importance of logic and rhetorical skill in speech-making and other forms of communications. Instead, he argues that humans communicate more than just words; we communicate ourselves—our interest, enthusiasm, self-confidence, and comfort. Thus Ailes titles his book *You Are The Message*. According to Ailes, "The secret…has always been *you are the message*. If you are uncomfortable with who you are, it will make others uncomfortable, too. But, if you can identify and use your good qualities as a person, others will want to be with you and cooperate with you" (21, emphasis in the original).

Ailes writes these words in an advice book for modern day executives, recalling his former and future roles as a television producer and executive. But Ailes also served as a political consultant, shaping communications strategy for Republican presidential candidates spanning from Richard Nixon to George H.W. Bush. In this chapter, I find that Ailes's brethren in the field of political consulting follow his advice. For political campaigns, the candidate is the message. To paraphrase Ailes, the words a candidate says in a television advertisement, a direct mail flier, or any other form of political communication are meaningless unless the rest of the candidate is in synchronization. If a

candidate is uncomfortable with whom she is, it will make voters uncomfortable with the candidate.

Political consultants argue that they must show voters "who your candidate is." Voters are skeptical of candidates for political office. By demonstrating "who your candidate is," consultants believe they can overcome voter cynicism and make their candidate appear likeable and authentic. Stories about the candidate, which feature much information from the background of the candidate, are the effective way to woo voters. Thus, campaigns try to identify the strengths of their candidates in an effort to impress voters. Consultants also use the candidate's background in an effort to develop the credibility needed to successfully discuss their issue positions. By telling voters about what their candidate has done in the past, political consultants believe they have an easier time convincing voters of what their candidate will do in the future.

These findings confirm the expectation I developed in Chapter 2—political consultants make the background of a candidate a priority in developing a campaign message.

THE SAMPLE AND THE INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

To examine the question of what role background plays in the planning process for political campaigns, I conducted a series of interviews with those who develop the messages that campaigns transmit to voters. Interview research has a number of drawbacks, including the increased likelihood of sampling error and the ability of the interviewer to bias subjects toward positive findings. I believe that the benefits of such a research design outweigh these drawbacks. Interviews provide the best method to examine the planning process for political messages. Through interview research, one gets the best sense of the relative importance of different factors in the planning process,

how campaigns make trade-offs between these different factors, and how campaigns try to combine different elements to create a message strategy. Interview research allows one to maximize their understanding of context and nuance (Fenno 1986; Aberbach & Rockman 2002). In studying the individual words that campaigns say to voters, I have selected a subject with a great deal of context and nuance. These interviews can provide me a more developed perspective on campaign messages, and one that can inform the coding and quantitative work I do later in this dissertation.

I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with political consultants, who are listed in Table 3-1. The interviews were conducted between February and November 2006. I limited my sample to general, media, and direct mail consultants—as these consultants are primarily involved in developing campaign messages.[11] The sample is primarily a convenience sample, developed from personal contacts. Other subjects I identified via internet and Lexis-Nexis searches for political consultants. Therefore, the majority of interview subjects lives and works in Texas. Some of these consultants work exclusively in Texas races, but most have direct experience outside of the state. I also interviewed six consultants based in other states; the similarities between their answers and the Texas based consultants indicate a lack of bias in the Texas interviews. Despite the lack of geographic representativeness, the sample is representative from a partisan standpoint; evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.[12]

TABLE 3-1 About Here

[11] Thus, I did not include as potential interview subjects consultants who specialize in other campaign elements—polling, fund raising, mobilization, etc.

[12] I should note that I observed very few differences in message strategies between Republican and Democratic consultants. Both agreed that they key to winning votes was to make voters like their candidate and convince voters of their candidates sincerity and credibility.

I conducted 19 of the interviews in person, and seven over the telephone. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. I developed a questionnaire, shown in Table 3-2, in an attempt to ask similar questions to each of the interview subject.

TABLE 3-2 About Here

The questions were designed in an effort to learn in general about campaign message development without alerting interview subjects to the importance of background in my research. Following the advice of other political scientists who have conducted research via elite interviews, I took several steps to avoid biasing my interview subjects (Leech 2002; Aberbach & Rockman 2002). When I contacted potential interview subjects, I told them that my interests were in campaign message development and strategy in general, and did not mention m particular interest in background appeals (Leech 2002; 666). I asked each respondent the same question at the beginning of each interview, "What process do you go through with each candidate to decide the theme of the campaign and the message of individual communications?" The questions I asked were open-ended, allowing respondents to give wide ranging answers and allowing me to maximize contextual nuance (Aberbach & Rockman 2002, 674). I did ask a series of questions about how and why consultants employed candidate background as part of their message strategy, but I only asked these questions after the subject had on their own discussed the use of background in campaign messages (Berry 2002; Peabody et al. 1990).

Each interview subject agreed that I could quote anything from the interview for attribution, and they are quoted by name in this paper. I recorded all but eight of the interviews, with the permission of the subjects. I asked no questions about specific campaigns, but only general questions about campaign messages.[13]

[13] In an effort to ensure candor, I told each subject that I would stop recording at their behest at any point in the interview. I also told interview subjects that I would not ask any questions about particular clients (nor

CREDIBILITY AND A SKEPTICAL PUBLIC

Voters are skeptical of politicians. "[The average voter] thinks politics is strange, bizarre, corrupt, and wrong. They're not into it," says Republican media consultant Brian Berry. "They think [politicians are] just selling me that he's going to cut taxes, when they don't. That he's going to stop crime, when he won't. And do all the promises." Democrat James Aldrete believes that voters start by thinking the worst of candidates, "To put yourself out in the public, most people just don't do. So if you're going to [run for office], they think that you are egotistical or power hungry, or there's a financial motive." In general, "[p]eople have a downgraded view of politicians," according to Spencer Neumann, a Republican consultant.

So when a voter hears a political message, she discounts it. Some voters think one political message is just like any other, and tune it out. "Once [voters] hear something, it's real easy to go, 'Oh yeah, same old, same old; They're just like the rest of them,'" says Democratic consultant Jeff Hewitt. Barry Barnes, a Democratic consultant from San Francisco, concurs, "voters are not inspired by a mail piece just on health care; it looks like all the others." Robert Jara, a Houston based Democrat, finds the same thing among voters, "Nowadays, everything is poll driven. So you're almost sounding like your opponent, or like every other person from your party. I think the voter just discounts that as campaign rhetoric." Celinda Provost, a Democratic campaign manager, says voters see all politicians as the same, "I think they will lump them all together, if they are yelling at each other. Voters will say, 'God, they're just like politicians.' And they're disgusted by that."

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did I). While some willingly discussed examples from particular campaigns, I have chosen not to include any of that information in this paper.

Campaigns do not want voters to ignore their message, but ignorance is better than the alternative—distrust. Voters can regard political promises as nothing but cheap talk, meaningless after election day. "It's hard to say, 'Trust me. I'll do all of these things.' Voters say, 'I've heard that before.' In general, people don't like politicians. The lack of trust of elected politicians, all the way across the board, is big," says Democratic consultant Christian Archer. Pat McFerron, a Republican consultant, puts it more succinctly. "Voters can spot a phony from miles away. If a candidate is not authentic, voters can figure it out pretty quickly."

Wayne Hamilton, former Executive Director of the Texas Republican Party, gives a simple explanation for voter skepticism, "People have been lied to so many times by politicians who will tell them anything to get into office; they've seen it so many times." David Weeks, a Republican media consultant, says that the expectations placed upon incumbents make them particularly vulnerable to voter distrust, "If you're an incumbent, and say 'I'm for tax cuts,' but you have no record of it, then you're a hypocrite…That's a dangerous position to put yourself in."

In general, voters believe they are impervious to campaign messages. "They're skeptical," says Aldrete. "They want to think that they don't believe anything that politicians and campaigns say. No one wants to believe that they are persuaded." The most important assumption that consultants make is that voters do not, a priori, believe the messages of political campaigns. As consultants introduce new candidates, or re-introduce candidates who have run before, the challenge is to identify a message strategy that can overcome the cynicism and distrust of voters. They must make voters believe in the sincerity of their candidate.

Credibility, Authenticity, and Likeability

Essential to overcoming voter skepticism is demonstrating the trustworthiness of their candidate. "Credibility is just everything; you can only comment and be convincing on what you've got credibility at," says Houston based consultant Dan McClung. Voters are quite skillful in their ability to assess the credibility of a campaign message. "The remarkable thing about voters everywhere is that we have this gut instinct of this screening process of what's credible and what's not credible…it's something that clearly ingrained in everybody," says Republican direct mail consultant Todd Olsen. Campaigns must first demonstrate that credibility before voters will listen to their candidate's message "The most important value that's reflected is authenticity to the public. The public will get a sense of it," says Matthew Dowd, Chief Strategist for the Bush-Cheney '04 campaign.

Voters want authenticity from their politicians because, despite their skepticism, they want to believe in politicians. "While we're really cynical in our crust, deep down we're looking for someone to inspire and motivate us," says Jeff Hewitt. Political consultants have an image as hard-bitten, cynical political lifers who will say anything to win. But important to them is identifying candidates who can inspire and motivate voters. Not surprisingly, the consultants see electoral advantages in their desire for inspiration and motivation—candidates who can accomplish these two goals can overcome voter skepticism. Campaigns must demonstrate to voters "who [the candidate is] in their gut. It's important to understand that gut value they convey and who they are," says Dowd. "I want somebody whose ambition is not just to have the title and the office. I want somebody who's got something they want to do, something that's driving them beyond the ambition of office," says McClung "Are they passionate?" asks Christian Archer. "Are they really going to go and be able to give people confidence in what they are

saying." Pat McFerron says, that consultants "want to understand why [their candidate] want[s] this position" so they find the most effective way to convey that rationale to voters.

How do campaigns demonstrate their candidate's authenticity and passion to voters? The first step is to make voters like their candidate. Campaigns want to make a candidate look more normal, more like the people she wants to represent, and less like a caricature of a "typical politician." "The only real magic to any campaign is how you make a candidate look human and sincere," says James Aldrete. Consultants need to make voters see the similarities between themselves and their candidate. "You have to have something that connects with the people…Have something that somebody can say, 'God, that's a great guy. He's like me.' Or, to get people excited about somebody," says Republican Spencer Neumann. By making a candidate look human, sincere, and like the voter, campaigns hope to get voters to pay attention to their candidate, "Before anybody cares about your position, they have to trust you and like you. There is a likeability and credibility threshold that a candidate must cross before people will listen to their issue positions," says Republican media consultant Jeff Norwood.

McClung argues that in order to demonstrate their likeability, candidates must first show their concern to voters. "There's got to be a certain empathy that people see in you. It's not just that you want to solve their problem. But you've got to know what [their problems] are. It is that level of empathy that gives them assurance that you might get it done because you seem to understand. I think their first take on you had better be how much you know about what they need. And I think that's how you earn their trust to start with." Christian Archer believes that campaigns need to make voters believe that candidates are similar to themselves, "You've got to say, 'I'm not a politician; my name's Christian. This is my life. These are my kids.' You've got to communicate that this is a

personal thing. You've have to be a friend, rather than a sleazy politician." New York state based Democrat Paul Novak sums up this rational succinctly, "Likeability is as important as capability."

Consultants argue that demonstrating concern is more important than a taking a specific issue position, because voters lack detailed information about specific issues. "A typical voter doesn't really care about the ins and outs and the nitty-gritty of that issue. Because you've got a family and a job and other concerns in your life. What you care about is that the candidate you are talking to communicate a concern for that same issue. That's all you care about. And then, you give him or her your vote, and ask him or her to go off and solve that problem," says Democratic consultant Kelly Fero. The average voter "just wants the candidate to say something brief that communicates that they get it, and that they share your values."

The need for authenticity and likeability means that campaigns cannot "pull any wool of the eyes of the public," says Berry. "They are so sophisticatedly smart. If I don't sell a candidate the right way, they're going to be on me. So you can't get away with much." Fred Harris, a Republican consultant agrees, "voters are really smart. It's really hard to fool the public…You have to know what your candidate is about. You don't want to have to re-invent someone." Norwood concurs with the idea that "you can't fool the public" because "people know [if your candidate is authentic]." The public's sophistication in spotting insincerity and phoniness compels campaigns to hew close to the candidate's true self. "You can't be somebody you're not," says Norwood, "Your message has to be real." Democrat Mike Blizzard also agrees that campaigns cannot fool the voters, "You can only shade people really here or there. You can't really tell the voters they're someone they don't believe who they are."

Thus, political campaigns must demonstrate the sincerity and likeability of their candidate, and they cannot fake it. That leaves an important question to answer—how?

STORY TELLING

While political consultants have a seemingly daunting challenge in trying to make their candidate seem authentic and likeable enough to overcome a skeptical electorate, they are unified in their belief of the best way to meet this challenge—by telling voters stories that demonstrate the core beliefs of their candidate.

"Messages are about telling a story," says Norwood. "You need to try to demonstrate to voters who your candidate is. And to do this, you need to tell a story." Consultants expressed Norwood's phrase "who your candidate is," or variants of it, frequently.[14] And they agree with Norwood about the paramount importance of storytelling as a means to connect candidates and voters, "What we like to do is to get them to talk about their own personal story, because ultimately, that's we have to tell their story," says Brian Berry. "You start with the narrative," says Celinda Provost. "You need to tell their story. [Candidates] all need a narrative in some form, and [voters] want to know who you are."

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[14] Some examples (emphases mine):
James Aldrete: "[A]s you bring issues up, particularly emphasis, and it has to do with *who your candidate is* and their background."
Marc Campos: "A message is who the campaign is and *who the candidate is*, and how they're going to be effective in moving certain issues."
Matthew Dowd: "You need that context. *Who the candidate is*. What strength of weaknesses they have and see how that fits with the thematic."
Jeff Hewitt: "You have to stay true to *who the candidate is*."
Todd Olsen: "A lot of what we're spending time on is how do we do a great job of communicating *who the candidate is*."
Celinda Provost: "You have to start with *who the candidate really is* at the core for the campaign to be a credible and a believable campaign."
Pat McFerron: "You need to have a deep and thorough understanding of *who that person* [the candidate] *is*."
Kathryn McNeil: "Because these are the issues that are going to dominate, and you have to try to tailor it so it fits. It just, it just depends on *who your candidate is*."

For consultants, the goal of telling stories about their candidate is to demonstrate their candidate's sincerity. The stories about a candidate should discuss past actions taken by a candidate, in an effort to explain the motivations and values of the candidate. Berry says, "Where it really connects is that we do it based on some incident. We like a tipping point in their life; we like to find a rationale…So, [finding a story] connected to somebody's real life experience is the best way to show that somebody's values are legitimate."

Campaign messages must compliment the story of their candidate, or they will fall flat. Matthew Dowd says, "You can't plan [your message] divorced from the realities of your own candidate. You can't come up with some things and then it's like, 'why is this candidate talking about whatever, when he's never dealt with it.' You must have that context: who the candidate is; what strength or weaknesses they have and see how that fits with the theme of the campaign." Jeff Hewitt says that if campaigns cannot tell a good story about their candidate, they cannot overcome voter skepticism. "You can think of candidates that don't match their life experience. You see it quickly and it doesn't make sense. It doesn't ring true to folks."

Consultants argue that stories work for two reasons. The first is that they enhance their candidate's authenticity to voters. "The history of a candidate says this is what I've done. These are facts that show who I am. Many voters, particularly swing voters, vote for the person—not the candidate or the politician, but the person. When you personify the candidate with their story, it is very, very beneficial," says Robert Jara. "People will see through them. They've got to be who they are," says Hewitt.

The second reason that stories work is that they reduce the distance voters perceive between themselves and a candidate. "No one in here [the coffee shop where we conducted the interview] is in the market for a Congressman. So the way that you connect

with an average voter is through a story. You really connect in an effort to say, 'you're what you care about,'" says Berry. According to Democrat Marc Campos, voters in focus groups he conducted "wanted to know about candidates, and the story that they bring. And then, they also wanted presented to them in an interesting way." Barry Barnes says that he wants to "allow a candidate to tell a first hand story…That helps tremendously, especially when that story is around an issue that voters care about." Christian Archer finds that stories about his candidates humanize them. "When you are able to tell stories of struggles and triumph, everybody relates to it. Everybody says, 'I have a cousin who did the same thing. I can relate to everything that you're telling me.' Now I've got a bond with person, this person and I have something that's in common. It's that initial bond that gets you to listen."

Why Candidate Background?

So campaigns want to tell stories about their candidate to voters. At the heart of these stories is the background of their candidate. Kelly Fero says that "[w]hen I start a campaign, the very first thing I do is write the campaign bio. That's how important it is to me. Because it is in the bio that I find the themes that will inform the messages in a campaign. And from the bio, comes the theme of the campaign, the slogans, the messages, eventually the ads, and the basic stump speech. Everything comes from the bio."

The stories that come from the candidate's biography tell about events in a candidate's life that demonstrate their authenticity and their understanding of voters. "For voters, trust is everything. Trust is built on knowing who that candidate is. They're going to look back at all the different things that the candidate has done over the course of his life," said Olsen. Robert Jara also finds that discussing a candidate's past actions are the

best way to build a relationship with voters. "The personal background gives you more of a dimension, and shows a candidate's values, like trust, honesty, and those sorts of things. [Voters] are looking for somebody they can trust." Dowd finds that background is crucial to developing voter trust, "The background is only a place to give you credibility to fight the campaign over the theme and the things that voters are connected to. You're background should give you the credibility to talk about the issues." "If your [candidate's] history illustrates current priorities and values, then you want to jump into that" with your campaign messages, says Barry Barnes.

Consultants identify three reasons why they choose to highlight their candidate's past actions. Background appeals can validate their candidate's concern and agenda, provide evidence of their candidate's political beliefs, and show expertise and knowledge.

Showing Commonality

Consultants like to talk about their candidate's past as a means of demonstrating their candidate's commitment to the issue. Voters assume that political candidates behave like stereotypical politicians, telling all things to all people, none of which the candidate believes. Thus, campaigns must first build up perceptions of their candidate's sincerity. According to Mike Blizzard, "people want someone they feel that they know and can trust. They want to trust them to make the right decisions. And the only way to cut through that is to make it seem as if that voter does know you, and can trust you; rather than a straight up litany of issues." Todd Olson agrees, "Voters feel like they need to trust a candidate, and trust is built on knowing who that candidate is." Matthew Dowd believes that background appeals demonstrate a candidate's priorities, "It's not only bio, but it's also who they are in their gut…It's much more important to understand the gut value they

convey and who they are as reflected in some policy things. That's more important than anything else. All of those things add up to something, but all of those things should be a direction to a gut value that you're figuring out."

The key to developing trust is demonstrating the credibility of a candidate's concern for an issue. Consultants feel that the best way to demonstrate concern is by telling voters about their candidate's background. Jara is looking for a "story we can tell about the candidate that says, 'I understand this. I can deal with this issue in a serious way.'" Part of that understanding is demonstrating what the candidate and the voter have in common. Christian Archer uses background information to make voters feel connected to his candidates, "You've got some [voters] who ask, 'Why am I even listening to this person?' What's the hook that's going to get you to pay attention? [Background information] allows them to say, 'I've got a lot in common with this person.'" By demonstrating what their candidate has in common with voters, consultants can develop trust between the two. "It's going to be how you grew up. It's going to be what professions you did, and what experiences you've had…And if [voters] have a simple cue that they can use to say there's a trust factor, they'll take that cue," says James Aldrete. Paul Novak summarizes the importance of commonality, "From their legislative leaders, people want empathy. And they will ask, 'how does he fit in with us,'" says Paul Novak.

One method that consultants highlighted as a particularly useful means of developing common bonds was through understanding the demography of the district. "There's a variety of measures that [voters] use to decide who's most like me. In small towns and rural areas, it's a huge credibility factor that you're at least from a small town, from a rural area as well," says Jeff Hewitt. Robert Jara is looking for "something that will give [voters] a cue that that's our guy. For example, did the candidate go to high

school, or work on a particular project in the district? What will say to that area, 'Hey, that's my guy.' That makes it real."

Evidence of Political Beliefs

Consultants argue that background, especially a candidate's background in previous elective office, provides credible evidence of a candidate's political beliefs. Background appeals, particularly those about a candidate's political record, allow voters to feel more certain that a candidate will meet her campaign promises once in office. "Record is a validation of your beliefs," says Hamilton. "And that's a pretty good validation. It's so much easier [for a campaign] to say 'He deals with theory…but I've shown you. You know what you've got with me.' So you've got a real difference. The contrast isn't on the issue; the contrast is on the results." Olsen argues that a background appeal "says to the voter that I've done this before. Not only am I smart and I know what I'm talking about, but I've actually done it before."

The need for evidence of political belief is, not surprisingly, very important for incumbent candidates. "Every campaign you ever work in with an incumbent, you go back and say, 'We told them we were going to do this. Did we do it?' And then we come back and we do, and we make sure we talk about it. So, yes, incumbents who say, 'I'm for tax cuts; I'm for cheaper health care' have to have the record to prove it," says David Weeks. Robert Jara says voters use record appeals not only to look back, but also to look forward. "With an incumbent, you're talking about some voting record, but you're also projecting it to the future. 'I've done this. Therefore, I will do this.' Rather than just re-elect me because I did this. If you leave that second part out, you're in danger."

Demonstrating Expertise

Consultants also use background appeals to demonstrate their candidate's knowledge, ability and competence. "What you look for in somebody's background that is something that you can say, 'This is why I'm better prepared than this person. This is why I can get things done better than him,'" says Archer. Mike Blizzard, a Democratic consultant, finds that incumbents can use their accomplishments to connect to voters. "People can point to a state legislator or a city council person and say, "…They're the environmental guy. She's the parks lady. He's public safety person." In that case, they kind of know what their issues are and where they're coming from." Jeff Hewitt also sees qualifications as important component of background appeals, "A key factor is have you lived a life, have you had an experience that makes you more qualified than I am to go [to the Capitol] and vote for me and all my neighbors."

What consultants look for is the ability to connect a candidate's experience with an issue of concern in the election. "That's how you develop your message, or who you are. You relate your life experience before you ran for office to how you can make a difference, and how you can apply that to being a good congressman or governor," says David Weeks. Republican operative Kevin Shuvalov agrees, "Once the threshold of knowledge has been crossed, you can take their expertise, and roll it into their messages."

There are important reasons for campaigns to emphasize the background of their candidate. Most prominently, background information is the most effective way for consultants to demonstrate "who your candidate is" and to overcome the skepticism and cynicism of voters. Without a credible background in which to base a campaign message, consultants think a candidate is doomed. Thus, campaigns have a strong incentive to use background appeals, and to do so frequently.

Background appeals can also demonstrate that a candidate's commitment to solving problems is ongoing, and not just a function of political expediency. "I'm looking for somebody who's realized that life's about more than themselves. And that they've been a participant in the community, in the state, in their local neighborhood. Is their biography available to the electorate," says Hewitt. In the end, background appeals provide the best information about the core values of a candidate. "Everyone has choices to make. A person tells who they are in the choices they make," says Aldrete.

HOW CONSULTANTS USE BACKGROUND

So far, the consultants have argued that they face a skeptical electorate, that they must demonstrate the credibility of their candidate, and that the background of their candidate is the best mechanism to demonstrate that credibility. Consultants thus place background at the center of their efforts to develop a message for their clients.

Table 3-3 shows the importance of background to consultants. The initial question in the interview asked "what process do you go through with each candidate/race to decide the theme of the campaign and the message of individual communications?" Nineteen of the 26 consultants interviewed for this project mentioned their candidate's background in their answer. This is more than twice as many as the eight mentions of district factors, such as demographics, and three times the six who discussed the issue environment.

TABLE 3-3 About Here

Some consultants gave multiple answers to the question, and consultants often think about particular elements of their message strategy in combination with the background of their candidate. Five consultants mentioned district factors *and* candidate

background, four combined background and the issue environment, and two discussed not only their candidate's background, but also the opponent's background.

While qualitative studies such as this chapter can suffer from biases in favor of positive findings, the frequencies listed above show how the importance that consultants give to candidate background without being prompted to think about background. Who the candidate is stands at the center of message development. Several consultants mentioned the district and the issue environment, but frequently mentioned the need to find the nexus between the demography of the district, the issue environment, and their candidate's background.

As a result, consultants who craft campaign messages spend a great deal of effort, and use a variety of techniques, to learn about their candidate and to shape that information into a campaign message. According to Barry Barnes, "the first step [to developing a campaign message] is finding out about your candidate and their background." "We need to spend time the candidate," says Pat McFerron. "You need to have a deep and thorough understanding of who that person is." Brian Berry wants to know his candidate's life stories in great detail "When we are first talking with the candidate, meeting with the candidate, we really shut up a lot and let them talk. And what we want them to do is, we'll say 'Tell us about your family. How did you get started in this? What's your motivation for running?' You ask some very fundamental questions about their heart first, to know who they are as a human being."

James Aldrete also participates in a long message meeting with his candidates, "When we're doing direct candidate work, we'll start with a two and a half to four hour session where you forget about what's politically smart, and what you're going to say in front of people, and just build an inventory of what [the candidate] can draw from." Jeff Hewitt wants to hear the candidate tell her own story. "The first thing I'll do is ask the

candidate to tell me their life story, in the most detailed lengthy way they can. If you don't have a half an hour life story, then you ought not be running for office."

Other consultants have a more formal process that they go through with their candidates. Jeff Norwood goes through a questionnaire with his clients "I ask them to tell me their life story," asking questions like "why do you want this job, what can you do for people, [and] what are your strengths…Most of the time, I ask them pretty standard stuff." Paul Novak likes to "sit down and talk unscripted" with candidates to find out "where they're from, what they've accomplished, what their values are…I find that very useful. And then I pull out what's compelling."

Other consultants believe that it takes more time to truly understand their candidates, and to identify background items to include in their message. Todd Olsen says he likes to "spend an enormous amount of time trying to get inside the candidate's biography, and look at the things that that candidate tells me are most important to him about his background, his personality, his character, and really delving into that. And then what shaped his political philosophy, and really delving into that." Fred Harris, a Republican consultant, learns about his candidates by "spending a day or two with them. That way, I can learn what they're like—how they talk, how they give a speech…I want to just hang around and see them do a variety of activities so that I can get a sense of what they are like and how I can best present that to voters." For Robert Jara, message development "is a slow process. I don't think you can get it in an interview. That's why I like to start early with a campaign, even if I'm not actually going to produce anything for months on end. Because I want to start to learning more and more about that candidate."

Spencer Neumann evens goes so far as to "make my candidates write me an essay…Tell me your life story in five pages. I literally say write me a little book about you. Let me know who you are. I don't want to know where you stand on immigration. I

want to know what affected you as a teenager to make you do what you did when you were 25 years old. What's the charity you were a part of? When did you have your first child? What was that experience like? When did you marry your wife? When did you meet her? What is your relationship with your parents? What did your Dad teach you? Did you play sports in school? Were you in student government? Did you learn anything through that? Did it affect you? Those kinds of things. It's the only way you're going to learn somebody, in my opinion, and to have an effective way of telling people…find something that connects, that feels good in people."

By asking candidates detailed questions about their background, consultants hope to identify the elements of their candidate's background that will quickly but comprehensively demonstrate who their candidate is. Christian Archer tries to identify "number one, the strengths of your candidate. That's one of the first things that I do when talking to people; trying to find out what they do and why they're running." Archer also wants to find "What their personal story is, that they can have other people relate to them." Kevin Shuvalov notes that "You have to remember that there is no message at the beginning of a race. It's more about your candidate, and your candidate's philosophies. The first thing you want to do is define your candidates. You'll pick your adjectives. And say our goal is define him by these adjectives."

COMBINING BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

The focus on candidate background by political consultant stands in contrast to the focus of political scientists, which has been the issue content of campaign messages. Issue positions are indeed important to political campaigns, but consultants argue that its importance is in the context of the background of a candidate. Consultants use the

background of their candidate to shape the messages that they transmit on the issue stands of their candidates.

Consultants argue that background information must come first in a campaign, because "there is a likeability and credibility threshold that a candidate must cross before people will listen to their issue positions" according to Jeff Norwood. Dowd also finds that "it becomes more credible if you filled in the candidate's [background] in a way that connects to your broad theme first." Only then, "can you go on to the issues."

Dowd wants to include those background elements as part of a campaign's broader message, "You may say that a gut value in this election is strength of leadership, or compassion. Then you can go back and look at their background and see what they've done that would convey that…You say what do we think this election is going to be about, and is it realistic or credible that our candidate fits that value that what we think it's about? And then what proof do we have that what he's done in his life or accomplished as a legislator makes people say 'Yeah, I feel that in my heart, now I gotta get that into my head.'"

James Aldrete says that he looks for elements of a candidate's background that fit together into a broader message, "the more important part is how you put yourself into your message. It's being able to share. It's having an inventory of anecdotes that you can draw from, and make connections to. Because typically, if you spend a couple hours going through family stuff, going through role models, going through community and religious stuff, going through what they think is wrong, or why they're running, you'll find that there are the same thematic values or principles."

Brian Berry says that a campaign must first establish their candidate's credibility and likeability before you can discuss the issues with voters, "The best way is to sell straight by going straight to their heart, by saying I'm going to tell a story about our guy.

And then if you like our guy, you're going to listen to him. If you listen to him, you're going to pay attention to the next phase of our campaign, which is the issue phase…You really want to start with that [background] phase to connect to those values that [voters] have in their heart and soul...Then after they like you, they're going to listen to you, and vote for you."

Political consultants believe that background information is essential to win the trust and confidence of voters. But background information itself is insufficient to win an election "You cannot win a campaign just by virtue of 'I'm the better person because I graduated valedictorian,'" says Matthew Dowd. "You have to take that and connect it to what you want to do in office." Marc Campos concurs, "I don't think you can just run a campaign on one, two, three issue, without attaching it to a face and a story." Only through attaching their candidate's issue positions to voter's perceptions about the candidate herself can a campaign succeed. Retrospective information is not sufficient to win hearts, minds, and votes. Campaigns must connect the candidate's background to other campaign elements to use it in the most effective manner.

Barry Barnes neatly summarizes the relationship between background and issues for political campaigns, "If you do pure issues without the candidate's story, you come across as flat. When you do a pure story without issues, it comes across as fluffy." Obviously, campaigns want to avoid both, and combine background and issues to achieve a presentation that is both emotionally and intellectually compelling.

Other Factors

The consultants say they must combine the background of their candidate with two other factors—district demography and issue salience—to develop the most effective message strategy. Consultants are seeking "a marriage between the background of the

candidate, the people of a district, and the issues of a concern," says Democratic consultant Mustafa Tameez. Jeff Hewitt concurs, finding that the ideal message includes "political environment times geography times the candidate bio. That would be sort of a simplistic formulation that would sort of instinctively go through." Kevin Shuvalov, a Republican, says that knowing these three factors "will lead you to what your message is," as well as helping a campaign realize "what [their candidate's] strong points are, or what areas they need to become stronger in."

A campaign must start by combining biography with demography. Candidates should focus relentlessly on local concerns, according to Dan McClung. "I find that it's better in convincing people to stay completely out of big issues, anything broader than neighborhood issues, practically. Keep it all down to where people know whether you know what you're talking about…If you can convince them that you do to as well, then you will expand your credibility with them." Mike Blizzard says its vital for campaigns to not only "know the community," but also to "knowing how to weave [your knowledge of the community] into your broader message." "You have to connect at some point with what [the local community] believe[s], says Celinda Provost. " You have to bring it home to the district, and you have to bring it home to the candidate."

James Aldrete explains how this process works, "What you really want to do is match the community or the voters with your messenger. And how is it that [voters in a district] see themselves in that person, or they see their hopes and aspirations in that person….And you're using the record to expose character traits about somebody, either positive or negative. You're looking for things again, that provide common experiences. It's the oldest cliché in politics to say 'one of us. Joe Smith is one of us.' But without using the cliché, that's what you're trying to communicate." Kelly Fero says "you recruit a candidate who fits that general profile. You have to kind of keep the geography, the

local issues, all of these things in mind." Christian Archer puts it in more succinct terms "You've got to have the right candidate for the right district."

Another connection that campaigns must make is between their candidate's background and the issues of concern to voters. "I think that the best combination are those issues that people care about in this election and those on which your candidate can show authenticity and can speak about with passion," says Dowd. Other share Dowd's perspective that campaigns must connect dry issues-based discussions into a more emotional pitch. "If you don't have authenticity" developed by discussions of who the candidate is, "you don't have credibility to talk about the issues," says Pat McFerron. "There's a human story on every issue, so it's finding where you can connect on it, and talk about it credibly," says James Aldrete. "There's something in [the candidate's] history, there's something about who [the candidate] is as a man that we're going to translate into all of these issues in this campaign," says Celinda Provost. David Weeks says there is even a human side to discussion of an incumbent's political record. "You spend most of your time talking about your record, or votes you made. You sometimes turn those into human issues and make them real." According to Jeff Hewitt, the important goal is to find in a candidate "a biography that matches what he's saying" on the campaign trail.

That background is insufficient should not be surprising; a candidate's biographical information or previous efforts will not, in and of themselves, produce any results for voters in the upcoming term of office. Background information does provide voters with an assurance of a candidate's concern, commitment, and capability. But as consultant argue, such qualities are only worthwhile if voters think they will lead to positive action once the candidate enters office.

WHO YOUR OPPONENT IS

Political consultants point out one other important area where the background of the candidate is important in campaign messages—in attack messages. Just as they try to present positive information about "who their candidate is," campaigns are looking to attack opponents on evidence that shows "who your opponent is" in a negative light. "You would prefer to run a race that is a choice versus a referendum. So having an opponent who has a record is preferable, because it allows you to say, 'This is who I am, and these are what I consider priorities. This is who my opponent is, and this is what his priorities clearly are, because his record shows this,'" says Todd Olsen. Central to showing who your opponent is thoroughly examining the political record of incumbents and candidates who have previously held political office. "You put them on the defensive. You go after their record, and say 'This guy voted for this and this and this.' He's got to defend himself," says Wayne Hamilton.

If campaigns want to show who their opponent is, they cannot take obscure elements of their opponent's background and try to make a case out of that. "A sure loser is where somebody sets out to attack an opponent on less than credible research. Or thin research. It's because voters see through it in the end," says Todd Olsen. Dan McClung agrees, "I mean, if they vote on something that's meaningless, that doesn't get you anywhere. It's got to be some serious issue, where they just have taken the wrong tack."

What is important in your research, says Robert Jara, is to identify contradictions between your opponent's messages and her actions, "If you can find something that is contrary to [your opponent's] message. And that way, voters say 'Wait a minute.' For example, a candidate who runs on a very strong tort reform plank but has sued three or four people." The best attacks highlight actions by the opponent that are difficult to dismiss. "What you really want to find the nuggets that really represent the man in full—

that there are many areas where there is a similar flaw. What you want to do is you want to have the same story by have multiple evidence to make the case. So the strongest punch is when you can say, 'He didn't do it once. He's a multiple offender,'" says Brian Berry.

In order to make a case against an opponent, consultants need strong evidence from their opponent's background to make their attacks credible. In fact, negative messages need more evidence than positive messages. "Your evidentiary proof line is higher for a negative or a comparative ad than it is positive ad; it's higher. Which is why more negative or comparative ads are more factual than positive ads. Because people are initially skeptical," says Matthew Dowd. According to Dan McClung, evidence gives "a depth of assurance that this is true. It just gives it that much more credibility. So we just would not do something that we couldn't put good, clear public documentation to it."

Good, clear public documentation is important not just as evidence, but because it comes from a neutral party. Neutral sources allow voters to see evidence as unbiased, and thus, they give such evidence more credibility. "It typically does help to have documentation to show that what you are saying is true or that people can go find that out themselves. You need to have, at least, third party affirmation about the charge. Whether that's just a headline that the charge has been made makes it more legitimate. It can just be a citation of a House record vote number," says James Aldrete. Kevin Shuvalov also sees the value of neutral sources, "You have to use 3rd party sources for your credibility. It's credible as long as someone else says it. Those third party sources are critical to get."

CONCLUSION

The consultants interviewed in this chapter make one point clear—for candidates to talk to voters about the future, they must start with the past. As hypothesized in

Chapter 2, the background of the candidate is indeed a priority for political campaigns in developing their message.

Political campaigns use background appeals as a means of developing their candidate's credibility. Consultants agree that voters are skeptical of campaign messages. Even when voters are not skeptical, campaign messages have difficulty breaking through the clutter of everyday life. To break through voters' filters, campaigns must tell the story of their candidate in a way that makes her seem authentic and likeable. Background information provides the evidentiary basis for these stories, showing a candidate's concern, political beliefs, and competence to voters. Consultants further argue that background information is not sufficient to win an election; campaigns must connect the background of their candidate to the people of a district and their issues of concern.

The theory of source credibility holds that the more an individual believes in the trustworthiness and expertise of the source of a communication, the more positive their evaluation of that sources' opinion will be (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978). The parallels between the findings of political science research on source credibility and the message development strategies of political consultants are clear and stark.

First, credibility is obviously central to both. If candidates cannot demonstrate their credibility to voters, consultants believe they have no chance of emerging victorious on election day. And in both, credibility is given by the recipient. Candidates must demonstrate to voters that they are worthy of receiving the voters' trust. Second, credibility is enhanced in both when the recipient perceives herself as having something in common with a source. A political source who can demonstrate her commonality to a recipient will be regarded more favorably (Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Druckman 2001). Political consultants use background appeals to show what the candidate has in common

with the voters she hopes to represent. Third, if a source can demonstrate their expertise, a recipient will regard her more favorably (Page et al. 1987). Again, consultants use background appeals to demonstrate their candidate's competence and fitness to serve in office.

Because credibility is so central to the messages that political campaigns transmit to voters, campaigns highlight the background of their candidates. The need to connect to their candidate's biography or political record affects what issues a campaign can credibly discuss, and, more importantly, how campaigns can talk about issues. Candidates who experience and expertise does not lend itself to discussing an issue with expertise are at a disadvantage against opponents with more relevant experience. Political scientists have found that the national issue agenda, partisan owned issues, and district demographics as key factors in determining the "issue agendas" of campaigns (Sides 2006; Sulkin & Evans 2006; Kaplan, Park, & Ridout 2006). The findings in this chapter show that campaigns consider these factors in determining what issues to emphasize, but they consider primarily through the prism of their candidate's background. Without doing so, they cannot credibly connect to voters.

To put it another way, the background of their candidate constrains the messages that political campaigns can transmit to voters. Political consultants can change their candidates only around the margins, identifying the best stories and best evidence that demonstrates who the candidate is, using the techniques of modern media to highlight their message. But in the end, "who your candidate is" determines the message of a campaign.

Ailes (1988, 122) summarizes, "The truth is, no one can manufacture an image for anyone. If you want to improve or enhance yourself in some way, the only thing a consultant can do for you is to advise you and guide you. We can point out assets and

liabilities in your style and then offer substitutions and suggestions to aid you. You have to want to improve and work at it. Most importantly—whatever changes you make have to conform to who you really *are*—at your best."

This chapter shows that political consultants make the background of their candidate central to their efforts to communicate with voters. Consultants want to show voters "who your candidate is." Now the question is do consultants follow through on their desire to discuss the background of their candidate. The chapter takes up this question using real world campaign data.

Chapter 4: Background Usage in Campaign Advertising:

Political consultants shape the overall themes of political campaigns and write the text of campaign advertisements. In the interviews presented in Chapter 3, political consultants identified the background of a candidate as the most important individual element of developing a message for a political campaign. Consultants begin the message development process by learning stories about their candidate's background, and then using these stories as the basis of their message to voters. By showing voters "who their candidate is," consultants hope to overcome voter skepticism.

The chapter moves from the planning stages of a campaign to its execution. In Chapter 2, I argue that campaigns *will* employ background appeals because they provide distinct advantages. In Chapter 3, consultants *say* they prioritize such appeals when developing a message strategy for their clients. This chapter empirically examines if consultants are able to put this plan into action, measuring how often campaigns use background appeals in their television advertisements. I argue that background appeals not only allow campaigns to increase certainty by showing voters "who the candidate is," but also allow them to substitute background appeals for specific policy commitments and maintain their incentive for ambiguity. To examine this, this chapter also determines the level of specificity of background appeals.

To examine how often campaigns employ background appeals and the level of specificity in those appeals, I analyze the text of television advertisements broadcast by Senate campaigns during the 2000 and 2002 general elections. My data set provides not only the text of political commercials, but also information on how often each advertisement aired. I can thus study both the frequency and specificity of background

appeals, and estimate the importance of candidates' biographies and political records to real life campaigns, providing context on why campaigns make such appeals.

Chapter 2 outlined my expectations for how campaigns should employ background appeals. The rest of this chapter uses data from the campaign advertisements to test four of the expectations developed in that chapter

The first of these expectations is that campaigns will use background appeals frequently in the messages they convey to voters. The next expectation holds that campaigns will avoid specificity when making background appeals. The logic for these two expectations flows directly from my explanation of why campaigns benefit from background appeals. Campaigns benefit when voters are more certain about what a candidate will do if elected (Downs 1957; Alvarez 1997; McGraw et al. 2003; Glasgow & Alvarez 2000). As the consultants interviewed in the previous chapter suggested, background appeals succeed by giving voters a sense of "who your candidate is." At the same time, campaigns have incentives to remain ambiguous in the issue positions they take during a campaign (Shepsle 1972; Page 1976, 1978). Background appeals allow campaigns to substitute information about their candidate for specific policy information. Thus, campaigns should avoid specifics when making background appeals. By studying the advertisements broadcast to voters, I can use the most comprehensive dataset available to test the validity of these two expectations in the real world.

I also examine two other expectations about how campaigns will employ background appeals when communicating with voters. First, campaigns will make more background appeals when their candidate's experience is proximate to the office she is seeking. Second, campaigns will disregard their incentive for ambiguity and make more specific appeals in three circumstances—when their candidate is not an incumbent, when the election is close, or when communicating a negative message about their opponent.

Confirmation of both expectations would provide further evidence that background appeals serve as a method for campaigns to develop the credibility and sincerity of a candidate while avoiding specific policy commitments.

This chapter proceeds by describing my main source for television advertising data, the Wisconsin Advertising Project. I then examine each of the four expectations in turn. I first determine how often campaigns transmit background appeals in their broadcast advertisements, and then examine the specificity of those background appeals. The next section examines what factors make campaigns more or less likely to discuss the candidates' backgrounds, and the final section probes when campaigns make more specific background appeals.

CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING TEXTS AS DATA

The data set used here is television advertising from the 2000 and 2002 Senate elections. I use Senate races for several reasons. Television advertising is common to almost all Senate campaigns,[15] and is usually the most important communication component in these elections.[16] Furthermore, Senate campaigns are not only relatively numerous, but they also provide variation in areas such as candidate experience, and competitiveness (Kahn and Kenney 1999).

I examine these advertisements using datasets acquired from the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, & Ridout 2002; Goldstein & Rivlin 2005). The Wisconsin Advertising Project provides the most comprehensive dataset available on

[15] Only 15 of the 108 campaigns that ran in markets included in the dataset did not air any advertisements on broadcast television.

[16] In presidential campaigns, the role of the national media in setting the agenda and reporting on campaign events reduces the importance of advertising to campaigns. Further, the small numbers of presidential candidates do not provide enough variation for appropriate study. In House races, direct mail is a much more common form of advertising, especially in districts within large, expensive media markets. Since no body collects direct mail from races across the country, political scientists have few resources to use in studying these communications.

campaign communications. It includes not only the widest sample of campaign advertisements currently available, but also the most detailed information available about both the content and the distribution of campaign messages. The Wisconsin Advertising Project takes data made available by the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), a private company that tracks the satellite transmissions used by broadcast channels for most of the country. The system's software recognizes the electronic seams between programming and advertising. As a result, the Wisconsin database includes information on every airing of every political advertisement broadcast in the largest markets (top 75 markets in 2000; top 100 markets in 2002) across the country. [17] The system's software also captures and downloads the text from all the advertisements, as well as storyboard images of every four seconds of video. Thus, the Wisconsin Advertising Project provides as comprehensive a dataset of television advertisements as possible based on contemporary technology.

The Wisconsin Advertising Project provides a great advance for scholars interested in the study of campaign messages. Previous databases of campaign advertising are limited because they lack a full dataset of advertisements from US House and Senate elections, as well as the capability to determine how often and where each advertisement aired (see Geer 2006; Goldstein & Ridout 2004, 216-217).[18] The Wisconsin data addresses each of these weaknesses of previous datasets. By tracking the satellite broadcasts of political advertisements, the CMAG system provides for a method

[17] Although there are over 200 media markets in the United States, over 80 percent of the population lives in the top 75 markets. As a result, the dataset does not include advertisements from Alaska (2002), Hawaii (2000), Montana (both cycles), North Dakota (2000), South Dakota (2002), Vermont (2000), and Wyoming (both cycles).

[18] For instance, the Julian Kanter Political Commercial Archive contains political advertisements from a broad section of congressional, senatorial, and presidential candidates ranging back over the past 50 years. Unfortunately, the collection methods do not allow scholars to know what percentage of advertisements aired in a year are included in the Archive. Also, the Archive contains no data on how often each advertisement aired.

to receive all advertisements from all campaigns without relying on intermediaries to provide that data.

Our scholarly knowledge of the content of congressional campaigns has been severely constrained by the (understandable) limitations of previous databases of campaign advertisements. The Wisconsin Advertising Project now provides data that allows scholars to study campaign messages and strategy in much greater depth than ever before.

Coding for Background Usage

Having such a comprehensive dataset allows me to code the text of each advertisement broadcast during the 2000 and 2002 Senate elections. I first code whether the advertisement included a background appeal, which I define as retrospective information about a candidate's pre-political biography, private sector experience, or political record in public office. Then, I code each advertisement for how it discussed the background of the candidates. For the sponsoring candidate, I code whether the ad mentioned the candidate's political record as an incumbent Senator, in another political office, or in the private sector. I also code if the ad mentioned the candidate's pre-political biography, or made a general appeal about the candidate's experience. For the opponent, I code whether the ad mentioned the opponent's record as incumbent, in other political office, or in the private sector. This list should provide a complete a list of the methods of background usage that campaigns employ.[19]

In this chapter, I analyze each airing of an individual advertisement.[20] I use ad airings, rather than the number of ads produced, as my unit of analysis for two reasons.

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19 No advertisements in the dataset included mentioned the opponent's pre-political biography, or made the claim that their opponent lacked the experience necessary to serve as Senator.

20 I also analyze the percentage of all ads broadcast by a campaign for some of these analyses. The denominator in these analyses is the number of advertisements broadcast by each campaign, not the number produced.

First, using each broadcast as a case yields the most complete dataset available. Second, Prior (2001) finds that campaigns air advertisements in varying proportions. Campaigns decide not only what to say, but also how often to say it. Some advertisements run over a longer stretch of time, and across more markets within a state. Thus, campaigns place more emphasis on the messages in these advertisements than they do in advertisements that run for a short period of time or that are focused on particular markets. In particular, campaigns are more likely to run negative advertisements for a smaller number of airings than positive advertisements (Prior 2001). Failing to take into account how often each advertisement airs can lead to distorted analysis (see also Jamieson et al. 2000).

I also limit my dataset to advertisements that aired during the general election campaign, which I define as beginning the day after the primary election in each state. Further, I only examine advertisements that were sponsored by a candidate's campaign itself, and did not include advertisements sponsored by political parties or by independent expenditure campaigns. Finally, I only analyze advertisements sponsored by the campaigns of the nominees of the two major parties. No third party or independent campaigns during the two election cycles under study were a threat to win any Senate seat, nor did any of these candidates win enough votes to "spoil' the chances of one of the major party contenders.

In 2000 and 2002, the dataset includes 816 different individual advertisements, which were produced by 93 different Senate campaigns and aired a total of 243,735 times during the general election campaign.

HOW OFTEN DO CAMPAIGNS TALK ABOUT CANDIDATES' BACKGROUNDS?

I first assess how often political campaigns discuss the background of the candidates in television advertisements. Background appeals allow campaigns to make

voters feel more certain about what their candidate will do once in office by showing "who the candidate is," and allowing voters to infer what the candidate will do in office. The political consultants interviewed in Chapter 3 argue that background information is central to the development of a message strategy for their campaigns. As a result, I expect that background appeals will be common in the advertisements under study.

The data confirm this expectation. Table 4-1 shows that nearly 79% of all advertisements aired in the 2000 and 2002 Senate elections mentioned the background of one of the two candidates for office.[21] Among all aired advertisements, 61.4% mentioned the background of the sponsoring candidate, while 28.2% mentioned the background of the opposing candidate.[22]

TABLE 4-1 About Here

Table 4-1 also provides data on how campaigns discuss the candidates' backgrounds, showing that such appeals focus on the political record of the candidates. Advertisements for incumbent campaigns say that "it's important to remember what [their candidate] has done" in office. Ads discuss their candidate's "strong record in the Senate," developed by "offering the first bipartisan prescription drug bill for seniors," "providing funds to shut down drug labs," and "never voting to increase taxes or cut Social Security benefits."[23] Nearly 70% of the advertisements aired by incumbent campaigns discuss their candidate's record as an incumbent. Nearly 40% of the ads aired

[21] A sample of 111 advertisements were coded by two different coders, to determine the reliability of the coding process. Ten different codes for background usage were available for each of the advertisements, and the level of agreement between the coders is 90.1%. Appendix 1 includes the coding rules provided to coders.

[22] Among all the advertisements aired, 50.7% mentioned the sponsor's record exclusively, 17.5% mentioned the opponent's record exclusively, and 10.7% contained information on the records of both candidates.

[23] These quotes come from several ads in the 2000 cycle—"Let's Talk" by the William Roth (R-DE) campaign, "Newspapers Endorse 2" by the Diane Feinstein (D-CA) campaign, "Prescription Drugs" by the Olympia Snowe (R-ME) campaign, "Drugs and Guns" by the John Ashcroft (R-MO) campaign, and "One Clear Choice" by the Rick Santorum (R-PA) campaign, respectively. The ad names are those given by CMAG.

by non-incumbents discuss their candidate's record in political office. These ads discuss how their candidate "voted against…tax increases and wasteful spending" in the Congress, how they "deserve extra credit for turning schools around" as Governor, or how they "eliminated the city's budget deficit, [and] helped create thousands of new jobs" as Mayor.[24]

Only occasionally (5.8% of the time) do campaigns discuss how their candidate's private sector jobs, mentioning that their candidate "has balanced budgets his whole life" as a business executive, or that he "has spent most of his life fighting for people" as an attorney. Campaigns discuss their candidate's pre-political biography just as rarely (5.9%), but are willing to discuss the "ranch where [their candidate] learned integrity, responsibility, and patriotism" or that their candidate "volunteered for service as a young man."[25] When discussing their opponent, campaigns keep the focus on political experience; only a handful of times (3.0% to be precise) did campaigns refer to an opponent's private sector experience.

The frequency of background ads also changes over the course of a campaign. I calculated the percentage of all advertisements aired that mentioned either candidates' background for each day from Labor Day to Election Day.[26] Figure 4-1a displays the seven day moving averages as well as the linear trend for the 2000 election. Figure 4-1b shows the results for the 2002 election. In both election cycles, campaigns were more likely to discuss their candidate's background early in the campaign, and then made

[24] Again, these quotes come from the 2000 cycle, from "Nelson Tax and Spend" by the Bill McCollum (R-FL) campaign, "Mary Woods Education" by the Mel Carnahan (D-MO) campaign, and "Record" by the Phil Giordano (R-CT) campaign.

[25] These quotes come from "Franks and Special Interests" by the Jon Corzine (D-NJ) campaign, "Fighting for People" by the Ed Bernstein (D-NV) campaign, "Ranch" by the Bill McCollum (R-FL) campaign , and "Good Man" by the Chuck Robb (D-VA) campaign.

[26] By tradition, Labor Day is regarded as the traditional kick-off of the campaign season. The data reflect this, as the number of advertisements run by campaigns spikes the day after Labor Day, which is 63 days before election day in both years. Only 8.8% of the advertisements in the two elections aired before Labor Day, too small to add to the Figure. These advertisements do fit into the broader pattern—80% of these advertisements mentioned the sponsoring candidate's background, and only 18% mentioned the opponent's

fewer mentions as election day neared.[27] But as advertisements that mention the sponsoring candidate's background wane over time, advertisements that discuss the opposing candidate's background wax as election day nears. This pattern is consistent in both of the election cycles under study.[28]

FIGURES 4-1a-b About Here

These results follow what Ron Faucheux (2002) calls the "classic" sequence of campaign messages, in which a campaign will "start positive," and then "respond to opposition attacks" and go "negative/comparative against opposition" (53). These results also correspond to the rationale for background appeals presented by the consultants interviewed in Chapter 3. They emphasize the background of candidates to demonstrate the candidate's concern to voters. The consultant also emphasized that they needed to first introduce their candidate to voters, before they could move on to either discussing their candidate's issue agenda or attacking their opponent. The data provide quantitative evidence that consultants do indeed follow this pattern.

In general, the results support my expectation that campaigns will make frequent use of the candidates' backgrounds. As seen in the previous chapter, political consultants make the candidate's background a priority in planning a campaign's message strategy. The data show that campaigns are successful at putting these plans into action, discussing the background of the candidates in the vast majority of the advertisements they broadcast to voters. If one assumes that campaign messages are both purposeful and strategic (as I do in Chapter 2), then one can conclude that campaigns make background appeals with such frequency because they benefit from making such appeals.

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[27] A bivariate regression shows that campaigns reduced the percentage of ads that included the sponsor's record by .17% per day in 2000 and .54% per day in 2002.

[28] Again, a bivariate regression shows that the percentage of ads that included the opponent's record increased by .30% per day in 2000, and by .48% in 2002.

HOW SPECIFIC ARE BACKGROUND APPEALS?

The next expectation holds that campaigns will avoid making specific policy commitments in background appeals. Ambiguous appeals help campaigns because they reduce the risk of offending voters (Page 1976, 1978; Shepsle 1972) and preserve a campaign's ability to respond to their opponent (Meirowitz 2005). Campaigns, having promoted voter certainty by making background appeals, should avoid specific policy commitments in background appeals. To test this expectation, it is necessary to examine how campaigns talk about the backgrounds of the candidates.

Coding for the Specificity of Experience Appeals

The problem for a political scientist in determining the level of specificity of a campaign appeal is that political scientists have yet to create a method to measure specificity. Page (1978) infers ambiguity from the lack of policy content he observes in the speeches of presidential candidates, but does not try to measure ambiguity. Geer (2006) measures whether specific appeals in advertisements discuss a candidate's personal traits or policy positions. From this, he infers that negative advertising contains more policy information than positive advertising. But his method does not measure the level of specificity of policy appeals.

To determine the level of specificity of background appeals, I borrow heavily from the field of Communications Studies. Scholars in this field examine not just the issue content of political advertisements, but context of the themes and images (Jamieson 1984; 1992), which is often missing from political science work on the subject. In particular, I make use of two elements that are more prominent in Communications Studies. Following Benoit (1999),[29] I break advertisements up into smaller parts,

[29] I should note that Geer (2006) follows a similar method.

examining individual phrases in the text of political advertisements. Hart (2000) and Jarvis (2005) examine the use of specific words and phrases, and code their meaning across various contexts, in an attempt to determine the semantic features of campaign content.

In examining closely the text of political advertisement, I determined there are two elements of a background appeal that can vary in their specificity. The first is the policy information, if any, that a particular phrases in an advertisement conveys. I refer to this as the object of a phrase, since it is what the appeal is about. By coding the object of an advertisement, I can determine the level of commitment to specific policies. If an advertisement says a candidate supports "tax cuts," she has broad latitude to determine the type and amount of tax cuts she will support in office. But if the advertisement says the candidate supports "eliminating the marriage penalty," she is committed to that particular tax cut.

The second element that can vary is the verb used in a background appeal. Verbs are the means by which campaigns connect their candidate to particular policies. Some verbs more specifically connect a candidate to a particular policy, while others provide a more ambiguous connection. For example, if an advertisement says that a candidate has "fought" for health care, a voter may know that she has done something, but has little information about what she has actually done. A candidate who "voted" to increase health care spending has taken more concrete actions to improve health care.

For the policy objects, I develop a five category scale, shown in Table 4-2 that increases in the level of specificity across categories. "No Object" includes the verbs to which no object was attached in the appeal. In "Personal," I included objects that referred to a candidate's personality or biography, but did not mention any government policy. The objects in "Policy Concept" mention policy areas but do not clarify the content of the

policy. Examples include "tax cuts" or "health care." For "Specific Policy," I include objects that concern the specific actions of government policies, such as references to how much money a tax cut or increase would include, or how a policy would work. "Specific Bill" contains objects about the specific names of bills.

TABLE 4-2 About Here

Table 4-2 also includes four categories for the verbs employed in background appeals. "Candidate as the Object" includes verbs in which the candidate is the object of the verb, as opposed to the subject who takes action him or herself. "Non-Specific Action" includes verbs in which the candidate is taking action, but the action is not descriptive of any specific governmental action. Examples of verbs used here include "fighting," "working," or "standing up." In "Specific Action," I coded verbs about actions while in public office. The most common verb in this category, by far, is "vote." Finally, "Specific Lead Role" includes verbs in which the candidate has taken specific personal action in public office to pass a bill or implement the policy when in executive office. This category includes verbs such as "wrote," "authored," and "co-sponsored."[30]

I used this scheme to code each phrase in an advertisement that discussed the background of the candidates. There can be multiple background appeals in an individual advertisement. Campaigns mentioned the background of one of the candidates in 631 of the 815 advertisement in the sample, and I coded a total of 1770 separate background appeals. On average, the advertisements included 2.81 background appeals.[31]

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[30] Because I designed my coding scheme to determine the specificity of a campaign message, it is different from others, which are trying to measure different things. Geer (2006), for example, simply wants to compare the amount of personal information in an advertisement to the amount of policy information, and does not measure the specificity of the policy content.

[31] Appeals" are defined as a specific argument that a campaign makes in an advertisement. Campaigns usually make several different appeals in an individual advertisement, either by invoking positions on different issues or by using several arguments about a particular issue. I use appeals interchangeably with "messages." I only code appeals that are connected to a candidates' background, and only code appeals that connect a verb and a policy object.

Descriptive Results

Histograms of the descriptive results are presented in Figures 4-2a and 4-2b. While campaigns do make frequent references to the backgrounds of the two candidates, these appeals are usually not very specific.

For the policy objects, the modal category is "Policy Concept." Campaigns tend to discuss only broad accomplishments, such as "protecting Social Security," opposing "wasteful spending," supporting "education," and keeping "jobs here." Campaigns will sometimes say more words about a policy, such as a pledge to "put patients over profits," to "make prescription drugs affordable," or by arguing that their opponent tried to "weaken clean water standards."[32] These appeals still lack any information about how the operation of such policies, and were coded as "Policy Concepts." Nearly a fourth of all object mentions discussed a candidate's previous work on a "Specific Policy." When talking about the own candidate, campaigns would discuss their work "helping intensive reading instruction," and "increasing school construction funding." "Specific Policy" objects often included negative messages, such as mentions than an opponent "voted against legislation that would make it illegal to use a gun within 1000 yards of schools," or "voted for $300 billion in new taxes."[33] Mentions of a "Specific Bill" are quite infrequent (about 8% of all appeals).

FIGURES 4-2a and 4-2b About Here

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[32] These quotes come from ads aired in the 2000 cycle—"Sarbanes' Record" by the Paul Rappaport (R-MD) campaign; "Fighting HMOs" by the Tom Campbell (R-CA) campaign; "Grams Negative Campaign" by the Mark Dayton (D-MN) campaign; "Has Done a Lot for MS" by the Trent Lott (R-MS) campaign; "AMA Praises Ashcroft" by the John Ashcroft (R-MO) campaign; "Prescription Drugs" by the Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) campaign; and "Ensign Environment" by the Ed Bernstein (D-NV) campaign, respectively.

[33] These quotes come from ads aired in the 2000 cycle—"Teach Children to Read" by the Richard Lugar (R-IN) campaign, "Education" by the Olympia Snows (R-ME) campaign, "Guns in School 2" by the Mark Dayton (D-MN) campaign, and "Nelson Tax and Spend" by the Bill McCollum (R-FL) campaign.

For verbs, the majority of background appeals come from the "Non-Specific Action" category. In the advertisements, candidates spend a good portion of their time "fighting," "leading the fight," "fighting [their] guts out," and promising to "continue to fight." Advertisements discuss how candidates "stand up" and how they "worked" or "worked hard." Campaigns will also say that their opponent "supported" an unworthy caused, "joined" with the wrong people, or "is twisting" the truth.[34]

A smaller fraction of appeals (about 22%) employ "Specific Action" verbs. Campaigns will talk about legislation that their candidate "introduced," "offered," "proposed," "sponsored," or "co-sponsored." The most common verb in the "Specific Action" category is voted, with some campaigns going as far as to emphasize that their opponent "voted to slash…cut…[and] abolish" particular programs.[35] Campaigns rarely discussed the "Specific Lead Role" that their candidate had taken in "creating the Roth IRA" or "writing the Chesapeake Restoration Act." In fact, campaigns are three times less likely to use these highly specific verbs as they are the least specific verbs, "Candidate as the Object." In this category, the candidate takes no action, but things are said about her, such as "he's been named one of the brightest Senators," or "she's a tough, effective legislator."[36]

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[34] These quotes come from several ads in the 2000 cycle—"Accomplishments" by the Spence Abraham campaign (R-MI) campaign, "Health Care" by Olympia Snowe's campaign, "My Country" by the Orrin Hatch (R-UT) campaign; "Right to Choose" by the Charles Robb (D-VA) campaign; "Seniors Rx" by the Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) campaign, "Serve All Georgians" by the Zell Miller (D-GA) campaign, "Education" by the John Kyl (R-MI) campaign, "Carnahan's Risky Plan" by the John Ashcroft (R-MO) campaign, "Franks Voted with Newt" by the Jon Corzine (D-NJ) campaign, and "Carl Marlinga" by the Stabenow campaign, respectively. The ad names are those given by CMAG.

[35] Again, these quotes come from ads aired in the 2000 cycle—"Children" by the Bob Weygand (D-RI) campaign; "Prescription Drug Coverage" by the Snowe campaign; "Grams Privatization Plan" by the Mark Dayton (D-MN) campaign; "Privacy" by the Bill Nelson (D-FL) campaign; "Set Record Straight" by the John Ensign (R-NV) campaign; "Nelson Tax and Spend" by the Bill McCollum (R-FL) campaign, "Lieberman Not Anymore" by the Philip Giordano (R-CT) campaign, and "Franks Slashed Medicare" by the Corzine campaign.

[36] These quotes come from ads aired in the 2000 cycle—"Power and Experience" by the William Roth (R-DE) campaign, "Chesapeake Bay" by the Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) campaign, "Brightest Senator" by the John Kyl (R-AZ) campaign, and "Newspapers Endorse 3" by the Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) campaign.

The results shown here provide strong support for the second expectation. While campaigns do discuss the background of the candidates in the vast majority of the advertisements that they air, these appeals are rarely specific. Campaigns employ background appeals not to highlight a particular accomplishment, but to quickly and credibly connect a candidate with a particular policy. Voters do want to learn about the candidates, but they want to do so in as efficient a manner as possible. Background appeals allow voters to feel, as the consultants suggested, a closer emotional connection with the candidate, reducing voters' worries about what the candidate will do if she takes office. But as the data above show, campaigns can accomplish this while avoiding specific details about their candidate's specific plans. Instead of using policy as a means of creating voter certainty, campaigns use background as an efficient substitute.

WHEN DO CAMPAIGNS BROADCAST BACKGROUND APPEALS?

The tests of the two previous expectations demonstrate that political campaigns use background appeals frequently, and they avoid making specific policy commitments in these appeals. This section examines the factors that make campaigns more likely to include information about the candidates' backgrounds in their advertisements.

A candidate's experience is one factor that should have a strong influence on the likelihood of transmitting a background appeal. Campaigns for experienced candidates can more easily connect the previous actions of their candidate to the concerns of a voter than the campaigns of inexperienced candidates. Thus, the use of background appeals in campaign advertisements should increase as the candidate's experience is more proximate to the office sought. In particular, incumbent campaigns should employ background appeals most frequently. Their candidate's experience in her previous terms as a Senator is quite obviously the most proximate to the job sought. Background usage

should fall as a candidate's experience is less proximate to the job of Senator, and should be least among candidates who have not previously held elective office.

Also, campaigns are inherently comparative, and the relative experience advantage held by one candidate should provide a valence advantage. Thus, campaigns whose candidate has an advantage in experience over their opponent should employ background appeals about their own candidate most frequently, while disadvantaged campaigns should use them least often. I test the effect of comparative experience by creating an experience advantage variable that differentiates between campaigns who candidate has experience more proximate to the US Senate than their opponent, those whose candidate has less, and those whose candidates have the same level of experience.[37]

Table 4-3 shows the importance of the candidate's experience on background usage. As the sponsoring candidates' level of experience increases, so does their campaign's likelihood of discussing their candidate's background in their advertisements. In fact, the pattern moves monotonically. The campaigns of candidates who have won election to a local office or the state legislature are more likely to discuss their candidate's background than the campaigns of candidates without elective experience (42% to 26%). The campaigns of members of Congress use their candidate's background (59%) more than locally elected candidates, but less than the campaigns of statewide officeholders (70%), who employ their candidate's background less than incumbent campaigns (77%).[38] The experience level of the opponent has little consistent effect on

[37] I follow other scholars of Senate elections by defining a candidate's level of experience based on the elected offices held by the candidate previously (Abramowitz 1988; Jacobson 2004). Incumbents obviously have the highest level of experience because it is most proximate to the job being sought. In my scale of experience, incumbents are followed by statewide elected officials, members of Congress, local officeholders, and then state legislators. Those who have not held elective office previously have the lowest level of experience.

[38] This number includes not only the mentions of an incumbent's record as an incumbent (as shown in Table 1), but also any mention of the candidate's record. For example, the Chuck Robb (D-VA) campaign

the likelihood that a campaign will talk about their candidate's background. In addition, non-incumbent campaigns discussed their candidate's background just over half of the time (54% for challenging campaigns, 51% for open seat campaigns), while incumbent campaigns discussed their candidate's background most frequently.

TABLE 4-3 About Here

The experience level of an opponent plays a role in how often campaigns will discuss their opponent's record. Challenging campaigns discussed their opponent's background in 41% of the advertisements they aired, the most in the table. Open seat campaigns talked about their opponent's background more than incumbent campaigns (30% to 20%). But neither the sponsoring candidate or the opponent's level of experience affects how often the opponent's background is mentioned.

Campaigns will discuss their candidate's background more often when they have an experience advantage over their opponent (78%). But there is little difference in the likelihood of employing a background appeal among campaigns with equal levels of candidate experience (49%) and those who face an experience disadvantage (46%). A similar relationship develops when discussing the opponent's background. Campaigns at an experience disadvantage are most likely to attack that background (33%), but campaigns for candidates with equal levels of experience are just as likely to discuss their opponent's background as campaigns with an experience advantage (22% to 21%).

Data at the campaign level shows that these patterns of background usage are constant across campaigns, and not the result of a few campaigns that air a large number of advertisements. I determined the percentage of airings for each campaign that mentioned the background of the sponsoring candidate or the background of the opposing candidate. Table 4-4 displays the mean for each type of campaign.

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frequently discussed their candidate's record in his pre-Senate job as Governor of Virginia, usually to contrast Robb's accomplishments with their opponent, George Allen, who was one of Robb's successors.

TABLE 4-4 About Here

Again, the experience of the sponsoring candidate strongly influences the use of that candidate's background, again in a monotonic fashion. The use of background appeals increases across each of the levels of experience. Campaigns for candidates lacking elective experience discuss their candidate's background in an average of 23% of their advertisements. In contrast, the mean incumbent campaign discusses their candidate's background in 75% of the advertisements they air. Also, incumbent campaigns discuss their candidate's background more frequently than both open seat campaigns and challenging campaigns (75% to 50% to 44%).

The pattern for opponent's experience is muddled. The campaigns of candidates opposing local officeholders discussed their own candidate's background most often (78%), and candidates opposing members of Congress discuss their candidate's background least often (58%). Campaigns opposing statewide officeholders or members of Congress make appeals about their opponent's background more frequently than campaigns facing off against those with less political experience.

Incumbent campaigns, not surprisingly, discuss their own candidate's background most frequently, 75% of the time. Challenging campaigns discuss their candidate's background less frequently, but discuss their opponent's background most frequently (40%). Open seat campaigns are similar to challenging campaigns in discussing their own candidate's background (50%), but are almost exactly in between the two other types of campaigns in their discussions of the opponent's background (26%).

The patterns for the experience advantage variables are even sharper here than in the aggregate analysis. Campaigns whose candidates are more experienced than their opponents discuss their own candidates' background quite frequently (74%), more than the campaigns with the same level of experience as their opponent (51%), and even more

than campaigns at an experience disadvantage (39%). The opposite pattern holds for discussion of the opponent's background, as campaigns at an experience disadvantage discuss them most often (40%), followed by campaigns with no experience advantage (24%), and campaigns at an experience advantage least likely to do so (13%).

Multivariate Analysis

These results support both of the explanations proposed for background usage in political advertisements. When the experience of the candidate is more proximate to the office sought, campaigns are more likely to discuss that candidate's background, in both promotional and attack messages. Campaigns also discuss a candidate's background more if that candidate has reached a higher level of political experience than their opponent.

Of course, these two factors are strongly correlated. Regardless of the experience level of the opponent, incumbents always have more experience than their opponent. And incumbents have the most proximate experience to the job they are seeking. Another factor that could influence background usage is the competitiveness of the election. Close races feature more discussion of divisive issues and attack advertisements, while landslide races usually contain more discussion of broad themes and consensual issues (Kahn and Kenney 1999). Furthermore, the experience levels of candidates have a particular and important relationship with competitiveness in congressional elections. Vulnerable incumbents and winnable open seat races attract candidates with more political experience (Jacobson 2004; Jacobson & Kernell 1983; Maisel, Stone, and Maestas 2004). As a result, Senate candidates with elective experience more proximate to the job that they seek win more votes (Abramowitz 1988). The correlation between candidate experience and background usage observed above could be spurious, caused by

the potential of election victory which attracted an experienced candidate to run in the first place.

To test if the relationships observed in descriptive analysis hold up in a multivariate context, I conduct two Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions. The dependent variable is the percentage of advertisements aired by each campaign that discuss the sponsor's background. I ran separate models for the sponsoring candidate's background and the opponent's background. To measure competitiveness, I use the margin between the two candidates in the public poll released closest to Election Day,[39] rescaled so that higher values indicate more competitiveness.[40] I include a dichotomous variable for each level of the sponsoring candidate's experience. I use a trichotomous measure for experience advantage, coded +1 if a candidate has won a higher level of political office than their opponent, 0 if both candidates have the same experience level, and -1 if the candidate has less. I also include two dichotomous variables as control variables—Republican and Year 2000.

TABLE 4-5 About Here

The results provide the strongest support for the expectation that campaigns will employ more background messages when their candidate's background is more proximate to the office sought. Campaigns are more likely to discuss their own candidate's background when their candidate has held elective office, controlling for any experience advantage. At the same time, the experience advantage variable is positive and significant. Both explanations for background usage hold up in multivariate analysis.

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39 The polls from 2000 are archived at nationaljournal.com. The polls from 2002 were provided by Daron Shaw, who has my sincere thanks. A complete list of the polls used and the results of the horserace standings are available from the author by request.

40 I follow the method used by Kahn and Kenney (1999) method of determine competitiveness. Specifically, I compute the absolute value of the difference of the candidates' "horse race" standings in the public poll taken closest to Labor Day. Unlike Kahn and Kenney, I then subtract that value from 100, so that higher values are more competitive. This simply eases interpretation, as positive values indicate increased competitiveness.

The opponent's background model shows that the specific level of a candidate's experience does not affect campaign strategy about attacking an opponent. Two factors matter: the competitiveness of the race and the comparative level of experience of the two candidates. In tight races, campaigns are more willing to mention their opponent's background. Also, when a candidate has less experience than their opponent, their campaigns launches more attacks on the opponent's background in an effort to reduce the opponent's advantage created by having experience more proximate to the job sought.

The results presented here show that campaigns use background appeals under two circumstances. First, campaigns will discuss a candidate's background more frequently when that experience is more proximate to the office sought. The success of the proximity expectation indicates that campaigns use background appeals because voters regard such appeals as credible. When a candidate does not have a background that lends itself to the office sought, her campaign much find other appeals to connect to voters. The second factor that affects background usage is any advantage in experience possessed by a candidate. Experience provides not only a credible means to connect to voters, but also a valence advantage over an opponent that campaigns exploit.

WHEN ARE BACKGROUND APPEALS MORE SPECIFIC?

The discussion now returns to the specificity of background appeals. Despite their incentive to avoid specificity in the messages they transmit to voters, campaigns are willing, on occasion, to use more specific verbs and objects when making background appeals. What circumstances prompt a campaign to forego its incentive for ambiguity and make more specific background appeals?

The campaigns and elections literature provides three explanations. Challenging and open seat campaigns might make more specific appeals because voters are unfamiliar

with (and thus more uncertain about) their candidate (Groseclose 2001). Campaigns in close races might be forced to take more specific stands to enhance their credibility (Kahn & Kenney 1999), and campaigns might be more specific because voters are more skeptical about negative claims (Geer 2006; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002). This section of the chapter will test these explanations.

I employ multivariate analysis, using the specificity of each background appeal as the dependent variable. I construct two multinomial logistic regression models (MNL) to test when campaigns increase or decrease the specificity of a background appeal. MNL models are used to compare the likelihood that an observation is in one particular category of the dependent variable, when several descriptive and unordered categories exist. I construct one model to test the specificity of the verbs used in background appeals, and one for the policy objects. In these models, the dependent variables are the verb and object category used in a background appeal. In the verb model, the reference category is "Candidate as the Object," and the regression coefficients compare the likelihood of each of the other types of verb categories being used on the appeal against the likelihood of the appeal being in the "Candidate as the Object" category. In the object model, the dependent variable is the "No Object" category, and the coefficients measure the differences in the likelihood of each of the other four categories and "No Object."

The first key independent variable is *Competitiveness*, again measured by poll margin. I include variables for ads sponsored by the campaigns of *Incumbents* and *Challengers* with open seat campaigns as the excluded category. To test for the effect of negativity on specificity, I also include dichotomous variables for *Opponent's Background Mentioned*, which include advertisements in which only the opponent's record is mentioned, and *Both Candidates' Backgrounds Mentioned*. Ads in which the sponsoring candidate's background is discussed exclusively are the reference category. I

also include two dichotomous variables as controls—for party affiliation (where 1 equals Republican) for the year of the election (where 1 equals the 2000 election).[41]

The unit of analysis for the two models is each time an appeal aired in an advertisement. With multiple appeals being made in advertisements that air many times in different media markets within a state, the models include 827,154 observations. The presence of so many observations makes the statistical significance of the model practically irrelevant, as the number of observations in the model greatly reduces standard errors. Statistical significance tells us only whether or not the estimate is different from zero, the precision created by having so many observations greatly increases the probability of finding such a result.

To understand the substantive significance of the models, I simply report the predicted probabilities for the model (regression results are presented in Tables A4-1 & A4-2). The values are the effect that each independent variable has on the likelihood that the dependent variable is in a particular category. I estimate the predicted level for each category based on different values of one independent value, while holding all other independent variables constant.[42]

The results, presented in Figures 4-3 a-f, show that the competitiveness of a race has almost no effect on the specificity of the verbs used in background appeals. Figure 4-3a shows the probability of object usage for the mean level of competitiveness (88.27),

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[41] Because these data include data from candidate level to estimate results from each individual record appeal, I considered different methods of clustering the data in these models. In one model, I clustered the data on each of the 815 individual advertisements that the campaigns produced. In another, I clustered the data for each individual campaign. While the different clustering models create difference levels of statistical significance in the different models, there are hardly any differences in the substantive significance between the different models.
In Tables A-3 and A-4, I present the predicted probabilities for each category of the dependent variable (as calculated by Clarify). These show that hardly any differences exist at all regardless of whether the data is clustered by individual produced ads, by the campaign, or not clustered at all.

[42] I used the Clarify program, developed by Gary King, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg (2000), to make these calculations. Clarify uses the coefficients to run 1,000 simulations of each model, to determine with precision the probability for each category of the dependent variable. The Clarify program can be downloaded for free from Gary King's website: http://gking.harvard.edu/.

and one standard deviation (11.83) less than and greater than the mean. Across each of these values across all of the categories, the objects used in background appeals are virtually the same. Figure 4-3b also shows that competitiveness has almost no effect on verb usage. Competitiveness has almost no effect on the specificity of background appeals.

FIGURES 4-3 a-f About Here

The status of the candidate has a little effect on the specificity of the objects used, but some effect on the verbs. Open seat campaigns use more personal objects than incumbent or challenger campaigns, but the differences (30.5% for open seats, 25.2% for incumbents, 23.1 for challengers) are not very stark. Larger differences exist though in verb usage. Incumbent campaigns use more "Non-Specific Action" verbs than open seats campaigns, which use more than challengers. The opposite pattern exists for "Specific Action" verbs, as challenging campaigns use the most, followed by open seat campaigns, and incumbents. While these results meet expectations, the differences are modest.

By far, the most important determinant of the specificity of background appeals is the target of that appeal. Campaigns use "Personal" objects less frequently when discussing either their opponent's background exclusively or both candidates' backgrounds. In their place, campaigns use "Specific Policy" objects. When discussing their own candidate's background, campaigns are more likely to use "Personal" objects.

The verb results in Figure 4-3f show a similar story. Campaigns use more specific verbs when discussing their opponent's background exclusively and when discussing both candidates' backgrounds. In fact, campaigns are more likely to use "Specific Action" verbs than "Non-Specific Actions" verbs only when they discuss the opponent's background exclusively. When campaigns discuss their own candidate's background exclusively, campaigns are nearly 20% more likely to use "Non-Specific Action" verbs.

More than any other factor, *who* a campaign is talking about affects *how* they talk about that person. The specificity of background appeals increases when campaigns are talking about their opponent's background because individuals are more skeptical when negative information is presented (Geer 2006). Campaigns feel the need to provide more specific information to voters in this situation, and do so by more specifically connecting their opponent to policy, which is discussed in more detail. Attack and contrast advertisements often include more citations from newspapers or the public record than promotional advertisements for the same reason (West 2001; Geer 2006). The importance of specificity in negative messages also helps explain why competitiveness has no effect on verb specificity. The descriptive data show that campaigns in competitive races make more specific appeals than their counterparts in landslide elections. That few differences are observed in the specificity of background appeals based on competitiveness indicates that the bivariate relationship between competitiveness and specificity is produced by the close correlation between negativity and close elections (Kahn & Kenney 1999; Jacobson 2004).

The results in the section show with great clarity the attraction that ambiguity holds for political campaigns. Outside of discussing the opponent's background exclusively, campaigns never use more specific verbs or objects. They provide voters only cursory information about the policy preferences of their own candidates, and only tangentially connect their candidate to these policies. Candidates may well take specific positions during campaigns, but it is clear that their campaigns avoid transmitting these positions to voters in their most important form of communication with voters.

CONCLUSION

The results from this chapter provide two important lessons about how and why political campaigns use backgrounds appeals. First, the results fit well with my argument that campaigns use background appeals to increase certainty about their candidate while remaining ambiguous. As expected, campaigns discuss background frequently but non-specifically. Campaigns discussed the background of the candidates in the vast majority of the television advertisements in the database; these appeals not only avoided making specific policy commitments (objects), but also avoided specifically connecting candidates to particular policies (verbs). The incentive to maintain ambiguity in background appeals is quite powerful. Campaigns will not increase the specificity of background appeals as a means of increasing voters' familiarity with their candidate, or to enhance their candidate's credibility in a close election. Campaigns are specific only when producing a negative message about the opponent.

The second lesson is that who the candidates are affects how often and in what manner that campaigns talk about the candidates. The frequency of mentions of the sponsoring candidate's background increases with the experience of that candidate. Campaigns also talk more about the opponent's background when running against an incumbent. Finally, campaigns will talk about a candidate' background more when that candidate has more experience than their opponent.

These results provide support for the expectations developed in the previous two chapters. Following the logic sketched out in Chapter 2, campaigns do make frequent but unspecific background appeals. Campaigns want to use background appeals frequently as a means of reducing voter uncertainty, just as they seek to avoid making specific policy commitments in these appeals. The empirical evidence presented here shows that campaigns are, for the most part, successful at meeting both of these goals. In Chapter 3,

the political consultants I interviewed discussed how background appeals are effective at reducing voter skepticism and meeting the threshold of credibility and likability among voters. But to achieve these goals, candidates must have experiences that voters find relevant to the office sought. The relevance of a candidate's experience to a Senate seat helps determine whether campaigns discuss the background of a candidate, or if they attempt to use other types of appeals to connect with voters.

These findings also suggest that a number of constraints on political campaigns that limit what they can say when communicating with voters. Campaigns cannot make claims that they cannot rhetorically defend, as shown by the connection between the sponsoring candidate's experience and record usage. Further, campaigns have incentives to avoid tying their candidate to particular policies. One could argue that campaigns do this because they are reacting to the constrained format of advertisements as well as voters' suspect political knowledge. But such a conclusion would not explain why they make more specific appeals about their opponent's record. Campaigns do this because they need to—humans are suspicious of the negative messages in general (Geer 2006, 50-63), particularly ones in political advertisements that sometimes show an opponent doing things outside the bounds of normal human behavior. While campaigns would presumably like to be more flexible in the messages they transmit to voters, the constraints imposed by voters' expectations about candidates and officeholders exert a vital influence on campaign messages.

Left open in the discussion so far is the effect of background appeals. Campaigns spend a lot of time and effort crafting messages that place their candidate's background in the best possible light. But at the moment, there is no evidence that these appeals are more effective at making voters regard candidates more favorably. The next chapter takes

up this question, examining if background appeals make individual voters regard candidates more favorably.

Chapter 5: An Experimental Test of Background Appeals

The previous chapters of this dissertation have shown the importance that political campaigns place on background in developing their messages to voters. Political consultants employ their candidate's background in an effort to increase her sincerity and likeability among voters, and attempt to connect their issue agenda to background information. In airing so many background appeals, political professionals assume that background appeals positively affect voters' perceptions of their candidate.

In this chapter, I test this assumption, examining the effect that background appeals have on voter perceptions of candidates. Research from a variety of academic fields shows that the source of a communication has an important effect on a respondent's willingness to accept a message (see Pornpitakpan 2004 for a review of the source credibility literature in psychology and marketing). When respondents find the source of a communication to be credible, they are more likely to use the message the source gives to change their opinion (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley 1953; McGuire 1968; Zaller 1992). In the case of background appeals, information about a candidate's past can allow voters to confer trust and expertise upon the candidate. If a candidate has worked on an issue in the past or voted a particular way in office, voters can trust that candidate to do the same in the future. A second possibility is that information about a candidate's past accomplishments can positively affect perceptions of the candidate's potential effectiveness, if elected to office. Both of these possibilities lead to the same expectation—background appeals produce more favorable impressions of a candidate.

To test this expectation, I employ an experimental design that assesses the effect of background appeals. I vary the occupational background of a mock congressional

candidate, while holding his policy proposals on health care constant. Since partisanship also contributes to perceptions of a candidate's credibility (Feldman & Conover 1983; Lodge & Hamill 1986; Philpot 2004). I also vary the candidate's partisan affiliation. An experimental test in needed in order to isolate the impact of background appeals, which is difficult to do in real world campaigns.

The results provide three findings. The first is that background information does indeed positively affect perceptions of a candidate. The second finding is that the effect of partisanship on perceptions of a candidate overwhelms the effect of background. Background appeals have a positive and significant effect on perceptions of the candidate only when respondents do not learn about the candidate's partisanship. The third finding is that the candidate's occupational background does not effect perceptions of his sincerity, but does have a positive and significant effect on perceptions of his effectiveness.

BACKGROUND AS A COMPONENT OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY

The argument that I have developed in this dissertation focuses on the incentive structure faced by political campaigns and examines the reaction of campaigns to that structure. The focus, therefore, has been on the behavior of political campaigns, and I have yet to address the role that voters play. This chapter turns the focus to voters, and I need to sketch out an explanation for why I expect why voters would be persuaded by a background appeal.

My argument in this chapter centers on the claim that candidate background serves as a source credibility mechanism for voters. The theory of source credibility holds that the more an individual believes in the trustworthiness and expertise of the source of a communication, the more likely that a recipient will accept and be persuaded by the

source's message (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley 1953; Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978). The content of the source's messages does not have to vary for a respondent to change their opinion, only the respondent's perception of the source.

A wide body of literature has shown the importance of source effects in assessing political information. Individuals will be more likely to believe a source they consider sincere. As such, elements such as the trustworthiness (Popkin 1991), party reputation (Iyengar & Valentino 2000), and ideology (Zaller 1992) can affect an individual's perception of political information. The credibility of a source is also dependent on her perceived expertise, with factors such as status (Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey 1987) and public approval (Mondak 1993, Mondak et al. 2003) affecting perceptions. Thus, a source's credibility can vary. Individuals react differently based upon the perceived commonality of the source and recipient (Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Druckman 2001).

"The dimensions of source credibility have been commonly identified to consist of expertise and trustworthiness" (Pornpitakpan 2004, 244), and background information can influence perceptions of both of these elements. Background appeals can affect perceptions of trust because many of them focus on the candidate's issue priorities and voting record. Such a message implicitly argues that since the candidate has demonstrated her concern about this issue in the past, voters can trust her to continue to care about that issue in the future. Since, as argued previously, voters tend to distrust political messages *a priori*, background information can thus serve to assure voters that the candidate's commitment to the issue is credible and not mere campaign rhetoric.

Discussing a candidate's background can also serve to improve perceptions of her expertise. Much like a job applicant who presents their résumé to a potential employer, a campaign message that highlights the past accomplishments of a candidate indicates the skill level that a candidate will bring to elective office. If a candidate has passed

legislation or implemented a government program in the past, voters can assume she would be able to accomplish similar tasks in the future. Highlighting the experience of a candidate in a particular field indicates the candidate's knowledge about the issues facing that profession, which she could better address if elected. For example, voters view incumbents more favorably because they regard them as more competent (Kahn 1993). Regardless of whether background appeals increase perceptions of a candidate's competence or sincerity (or both), background appeals should improve the standing of a candidate in the eyes of voters.

Background appeals should therefore help campaigns in their efforts to woo voters. As shown previously, political consultants certainly behave as if they do. Thus, I expect that background appeals will improve perceptions of a candidate. Research into source effects posits that trust and expertise are two factors that source credibility can influence. In addition to testing the effect of background on overall perceptions of the candidate, I will also test its effect on trust and expertise. I expect to find a positive relationship between both factors and background appeals.

AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST OF THE EXPERIENCE BENEFIT

To test my hypotheses, I use an experimental design that varies the occupational background of a candidate, while holding constant the issue content. An experimental design is necessary to isolate the value of background separate from other confounding factors. In the real world, campaigns connect a candidate's background to particular issue positions and trait characteristics, which would complicate the task of isolating the effect of background in an observational study.

In this experiment, respondents view a mock direct mail piece from a mock congressional campaign. Then, respondents give their overall impressions of the

candidate using a traditional 100-point thermometer rating.[43] Respondents also give their impressions of the sincerity and effectiveness of the candidate. I included these measures of the two elements of source credibility identified by the literature to determine if either of these components is the proximate cause of any background benefit. The source credibility hypothesis holds that respondents in the occupational treatments will give higher ratings to the candidate than those in the control group, who learn nothing about his occupational background.

In the experiment, the candidate and his health care policy positions are held constant. Respondents viewed a mock direct mail piece for the "Sam Kelley for Congress" campaign. Figure 5-1 shows one version of the mail piece. The mail piece was designed to look like an actual campaign piece. I worked with a political consultant to write and design the mock piece.[44] The front features a picture of the mock candidate, who says "My Number One Goal: Improve Our Health Care." The back details the specifics of Kelley's health care plan,[45] as well as a statement from Kelley that he "will wait no longer" to fix the nation's health care system. All of this information was constant across each treatment group.

FIGURE 5-1 About Here

[43] Thermometer ratings are not direct measures a respondent's preference for a candidate, but they do serve as good proxies for vote choice. In the 2004 American National Election Study, the thermometer ratings for both candidates had a positive and significant correlation with voting for each of the major candidates (.58 for Bush, .17 for Kerry). Only 41 out of the 1042 respondents who gave distinguishing thermometer ratings voted for the candidate who they regarded as less warm. I use thermometer ratings primarily because the absence of a second candidate in the experiment makes measures of vote choice unreliable.

[44] Before viewing the piece, respondents were read an introduction that said, "We're interested in finding out how people react to some of the advertising that campaigns do. Following this is a direct mail piece from a congressional campaign for you to consider."

[45] I tried to make the issue content of Mr. Kelley's press release include non-contradictory proposals that come from both major parties. For example, in the health care plan, I took one element from the 2004 Democratic Party platform (guaranteeing patients to see the doctor of their choice, even if that doctor is a specialist), and one from the Health Care section of the White House website (ending regulations and laws require consumers to purchase health insurance only in the state in which they live).

Variation comes from Kelley's occupational background, and how his background is connected to his rationale for wanting to improve health care. Kelley can:

1) be "a doctor and surgeon at Memorial St. Joseph Hospital",
2) be a state legislator who "passed the Patient's Bill of Right Act of 2004,"
3) be a "small business owner," who "knows firsthand" the costs of health care,
4) have both 1 and 2 as his backgrounds, and
5) have no occupation background mentioned (the control group).

Each version of the mail piece includes a quote from Kelley connecting his experience to his advocacy for his health care plan (for the text of each experimental manipulation, see Table A5-1). I selected these specific in an effort to create variation in candidate background in a manner consistent with how real world campaigns employ background appeals. In particular, the text of the mock direct mail flier tries to mimic how campaigns try to connect a candidate's background and issue agenda. A campaign for a doctor would almost assuredly highlight health care. Those campaigning for a candidate who passed a major health care bill in the state legislature will highlight that accomplishment in a campaign.

While I have no strong theoretical expectations about how these particular occupations might affect perceptions of the candidate, I chose these backgrounds to represent the range of background appeals that a non-incumbent campaign might make. Some (*Doctor*, *Politician*) feature a close connection between the actions in a candidate's past and their plans for the future. The *Both* treatment examines if there is a cumulative effect between two connected backgrounds. Finally, the *Businessman* treatment is employed to test if a background that is tenuously related to the issue affects perceptions of the candidate in a similar way to more obvious connections.

In addition to testing the effect of background on voter perceptions, I also examine its relationship to the partisanship of the source. Partisanship serves as a source credibility mechanism for a candidate, connecting candidates to the party's history, issue

stands, constituents, and symbols (Lodge & Hamill 1986; Philpot 2004). The two major American political parties have their own stereotypes that alter voter perceptions of individual candidates (Rahn 1993). Voters regard candidates from the two parties as differently able to handle particular issues (Petrocik 1996) and possessing different trait characteristics (Hayes 2005). While I have no strong prior assumptions about how particular occupational backgrounds might interact with the candidate's party, the strong influence of partisanship and party stereotypes means that such an interaction is possible, and is worthy of examination. To test this, I vary Candidate Kelley's partisanship, in addition to varying his occupation.[46]

Experimental Procedure

The sample of 959 respondents comes from the University of Texas module of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. The online survey was conducted by Polimetrix between late September and late October, 2006. Polimetrix matches randomly selected people from a list of all consumers in the United States to individuals who have agreed to take surveys as part of the Polling Point panel (see Rivers 2005 for more details on Polimetrix's sampling methodology). This method is designed to produce a random sample of the national population within each module of the survey.[47]

The CCES is an online survey. Respondents first answered 34 "common content" questions, which were asked to respondents in all modules of the survey.[48] None of these

[46] Kelley's party identification is in the campaign logo, and not part of the text of the message itself. Kelley can be identified as a "Democrat for Congress," a "Republican for Congress, and, in the No Party condition, simply "for Congress." The logo appears on both the "Front" and the "Back" of the flier.
[47] The CCES survey is biased towards the knowledgeable and the politically active. For example, 89% of unweighted respondents claim to have voted in the 2006 election. While the experimental design of this paper reduces worries about the bias in the sample, cautions are still in order. The more political literate sample may pick up on cues quicker than other, such as the subtle placement of the candidate's party affiliation.
[48] A list of the common content questions is available at: http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/material/CCES_Common_Content_August_15_2006_final.pdf.

questions directly addressed the health care issues in the mock mail piece, though respondents were asked about whether they would have voted to allow funding for stem cell research, and how they think their two Senators voted on such a bill.[49] The respondents then viewed a module of questions designed by scholars at the University of Texas at Austin. Before the experiment, respondents in the Texas module answered questions about their impressions of various national political figures, and questions about which party they trusted more to handle a series of issues, including health care.[50]

Respondents were randomly assigned into one of 15 different experimental groups, with each group viewing a different version of the direct mail flier. Respondents then answered questions about their impressions of Sam Kelley, the candidate in the flier. Respondents were also asked to evaluate their feelings toward Mr. Kelley on a 100 point feeling thermometer rating (on a traditional 0 to 100 point scale).[51] Respondents were asked to include their perception of the candidate's sincerity and effectiveness on an 11 point rating (on a 0 to 10 scale).[52]

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[49] Specifically, the questionnaire said, "Now we'd like to ask about whether the government should fund stem cell research. Some politicians argue that this research may lead to cures for diseases and disabilities affecting large numbers of American, and should be funded. Others argue that a potential human life has to be destroyed in order to use these cells, and funding it would be unethical. What do you think? If you were faced with this decision, would you vote for or against funding this research?"

[50] Specifically, the questionnaire said, "Please tell us which political party you think would do a better job handling each of the following issues." The issues were the economy, national security, social security, health care, the federal budget deficit, and crime. The issues were shown in random order, in an effort to avoid priming health care considerations.

[51] The text of the survey question is borrowed almost word for word from the National Election Study's thermometer rating question. It reads, "Now that you've read the press release from Sam Kelley's campaign, I'd like to get your feelings about him. Please rate Sam Kelley on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. A rating about 50 means that you feel favorable and ward toward the person. A rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool toward the person. A rating right at the 50 degree mark means that you don't feel particularly warm or cold. You may use any number from 0 to 100 to tell me how favorable or unfavorable your feelings are."

[52] Respondents used a widget to rank the candidate's sincerity and effectiveness, which allowed them to see all 11 responses at the same time and place the widget at their preferred level. Under the 0 response was "Not Sincere/Effective at All, under the 10 response was "Extremely Sincere/Effective," and under the 5 response was "Neutral."

NO PARTY RESULTS

Descriptive results in Figure 5-2 show the difference in mean thermometer ratings between the experimental treatment groups and the control group. The *Background* category combines each of the four treatment groups into a single variable.[53] By combining the four treatment groups together and comparing them to the control group, I can examine the effect of background itself on perceptions of the candidate. The analysis in Figure 5-2 includes only the 331 respondents who received no information about the candidate's party affiliation.

FIGURE 5-2 About Here

The results in the background category show that respondents regarded the candidate 5.18 "degrees warmer" when they learned about his occupation than respondents in the control treatment, who gave Kelley a mean 52.7 rating;[54] this difference is statistically significant ($t = 1.98$; $p = .02$).[55] Breaking responses down by specific occupation treatment shows the effect is relatively constant regardless of the candidate's occupation. Respondents in the *Businessman* treatment gave the candidate a mean rating of 59.4, which is significantly warmer than the control group ($t = 2.10$; $p = .02$). Respondents also regarded the candidate as 5.52 "degrees" warmer as a *Doctor*, and 4.44 "warmer" as a *Politician*. Both are statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level (*Doctor*: $t = 1.61$; $p = .06$; *Politician*: $t = 1.31$; $p = .096$). Respondents did regard the *Dr. Politician* as 4.08 "degrees warmer" than when Candidate Kelley had no occupation, this difference is not statistically significant.

These results provide supportive evidence that the occupation of a candidate serves as a source credibility mechanism. When the candidate does not have an

[53] Thus, the Doctor, Politician, Dr. Politician, and Businessman categories.
[54] The mean values and the N for each dependent variable in the experimental cell are included in Tables A5-2 through 4.
[55] All analysis in this chapter includes one-tailed tests.

occupation, respondents do not have a particularly favorable view of him. When they learn that the candidate is an accomplished professional, they increase their evaluation of him.

Figure 5-3 shows that, contrary to expectations, respondents give the highest sincerity ratings to the candidate when they did not learn about his occupational background (mean rating of 5.93). In each of the occupational treatments, respondents regarded the candidate as less sincere than the control group. These differences are not statistically significant, except for the *Doctor*, which reached the $p < .10$ level of significance.

FIGURE 5-3 About Here

Figure 5-4 shows the effectiveness ratings that respondents gave Candidate Kelley. These results fit expectations, in that respondents gave him more favorable ratings when Kelley had an occupation than in the control group, when he did not. However, these differences are not statistically significant in any experimental condition.

FIGURE 5-4 About Here

The results presented here show that there is a benefit, albeit modest, to making background appeals. Respondents gave higher thermometer ratings when they read about the background of the candidate, and particularly liked the Politician and the Doctor. These results are tempered through by the results in the sincerity and effectiveness models, which show no background benefit.

OCCUPATION AND PARTY

In addition to varying the occupation of the candidate, the experimental design also varied Candidate Kelley's party affiliation between a *Democrat*, *Republican* and a *No Party* condition. The policy content of the direct mail piece remained constant,

regardless of Kelley's party. Figure 5-5 shows the difference in thermometer ratings from the control group (*None No Party*) for each of the 14 other treatment groups. In general, the data show that a respondent's perception of the parties has a strong effect on how individuals view a candidate. For example, Candidate Kelley was always perceived more positively as a Democrat, though none of these ratings are significantly different from the *None No Party* category. Respondents in the *No Party* treatment also regarded the candidate more favorably when they read about his occupational background. The differences were statistically significant in the two conditions where Candidate Kelley is not a politician, *Doctor* and *CEO*.

FIGURE 5-5 About Here

While perceptions of Candidate Kelley are relatively constant across occupation in the *Democrat* and *No Party* treatments, there is a wide variation among different occupations when Kelley is a Republican. Respondents viewed him more favorably as a Republican Doctor or a Republican Businessman than respondents in the control group. When Kelley is a *Republican Dr. Politician*, voters view him almost the same as if they learned nothing of his party or occupation. But when Kelley is a *Republican Politician*, voters view him significantly less favorably than the control group. In fact, respondents give the *Republican Politician* a mean favorability of 48.4, the only "cool" rating among the 15 different treatment groups. In difference of means tests, the thermometer rating for Republican politician is significantly "cooler" than each of the other 14 treatments. These results show just how unpopular Republican politicians were in the Fall of 2006, which of course, was shown in the election results.

The results show that the effect of background is contingent upon a candidate's partisanship. The results for both the *Democrat* and *No Party* treatment have a relatively consistent effect across the various occupation treatments. The results for *Republican*,

though, are highly contingent upon the candidate's occupation; respondents regarded the *Doctor* and *CEO* quite favorably, but dislike the *Politician*. While background itself was a positive signal to respondents in the *No Party* and *Democrat* treatment, different backgrounds have different effects for Republicans.

Multivariate Analysis

The results of the descriptive analysis show that partisanship plays a strong role in affecting perceptions of the candidate. Such a finding is not surprising; party identification is the dominant predictor of political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Lodge & Hamill 1986; Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992). Since partisanship has an effect on perceptions separate from background, it is important to control for partisanship. As a result, I use multivariate analysis to isolate the effect of background. Here, I use OLS regression with the thermometer ratings as the dependent variable. In this analysis, all respondents are included in the model, regardless of the candidate's party affiliation.

The first set of independent variables is the experimental conditions to which a respondent could have been exposed. The variable *Background* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the respondent viewed information that included information about the candidate's experience, and 0 if the respondent was in the control group. I also run a model with the individual experimental conditions broken out as separate independent variables (*Doctor*, *Politician*, and *Dr. Politician*, and *Businessman* are in the model, with None as the excluded category). These models include all three of the treatments for Candidate Kelley's party affiliation. Thus, I include a dichotomous variable for *Democrat* and *Republican*, with the No Party treatment as the excluded category.

The second set of independent variables deal with the characteristics of the respondents. First, the model uses two variables to measure the effect of party

identification—*Same Party as Candidate* for respondents who share their party identification[56] with the candidate they read about, and *Opposite Party as Candidate* for Democrats who read about a Republican candidate, and vice versa. The strong effect of partisanship means that respondents should regard the candidate more favorably when they share a party identification, and less favorably when their partisanship diverges.

I also include two measures to examine how the respondents pre-existing attitudes on health care might affect their perceptions of Candidate Kelley and his health care proposals. As noted, before viewing the mock direct mail flier, respondents were asked which party they thought would do a better job "handling" a variety of issues. The variable *Issue Handling Advantage* is coded 1 if the respondent thought that one of the parties "would do a better job of dealing with the issue of health care," and the respondent was in the treatment group for that party. The next variable measures the issue distance that respondents perceive between themselves and the candidate. After viewing the mock direct mail flier, the questionnaire asked respondents to give their health care position and their perception of Candidate Kelley on an 11 point ideological spectrum (0 to 10) that runs from most conservative to most liberal.[57] The variable *Health Care Issue Distance* measures the absolute value of the difference between a respondent's own position and a respondent's perception of Kelley's position. Greater distances should produce less favorable impressions.[58]

The results, presented in Table 5-1, show that in a multivariate context, background has almost no effect on respondent perceptions of the candidates. A background appeal only increases perceptions by 1.92 "degrees," which barely reaches

[56] i.e. Democratic respondents in the Democratic treatment, and Republican respondents in the Republican treatment. Here, partisans include respondents who identified themselves first as independents, but who say they "lean" toward one of the major political parties (see Keith et al. 1992).

[57] A spectrum was provided to respondents. Under the 0 rating was "Spend far less on health care." Under the 5 rating was "Keep health care spending at current levels." Under the 10 ratings was "Spend much more on health care." Respondents first gave their own position, and they were asked to give Candidate Kelley's.

[58] Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are presented in Table A5-6.

the most generous level of statistical significance. Among the four different occupation treatments, only the *Doctor* receives a significant boost from his background. Party plays an important role in determining perceptions of the candidate, but that role is negative. Respondents regard the candidate as significantly "cooler," *ceteris paribus*, when he is a Republican or a Democrat than when they learn nothing of his partisanship. While respondent party identification itself does not affect perceptions of the candidate, respondents are 8.8 "degrees warmer" to Candidate Kelley when he belongs to the party they think can better handle the issue of health care. Issue distance, as expected, has a negative effect on perceptions of Candidate Kelley, and the more conservative the respondent, the less favorably they regard Candidate Kelley.

TABLE 5-1 About Here

I also run models to examine the effect of background on perceptions of sincerity and effectiveness, using the same set of independent variables as in Table 5-1. The results for sincerity (models 1 and 2 in Table 5-2) again show how important issue perceptions—whether issue distance or a handling advantage—are in determining perceptions of Candidate Kelley. Unlike the thermometer rating models, party plays a greater role in determining sincerity. If the candidate and respondent share their party identification, respondents regard that candidate as significantly more sincere. Surprisingly, respondents regard the candidate as more sincere when he belongs to the opposite political party. Consistent with other findings is the importance of issue handing and issue distance; respondents trust the candidate more when he belongs to a party they think can handle health care better, and when they think their issue positions are similar.

TABLE 5-2 About Here

The effect of background on sincerity, though, is practically non-existent. Being in one of the occupation treatments only increases perceptions of the candidate's sincerity

by 0.07. None of the individual occupations had a significant effect on sincerity perceptions. The results produce a simple conclusion—background appeals have no impact on voter perceptions of a candidate's sincerity.

The sincerity results stand in sharp contrast to the results for effectiveness (models 3 and 4). Background does have a significant effect on perceptions of the candidate's effectiveness. A background appeal, regardless of its content, increases effectiveness ratings by 0.39. Individual occupations can have a strong effect on effectiveness, as three of the four treatments reach statistical significance. Respondents in the *Doctor* treatment regarded the candidate as 0.72 more effective than respondents in the control group, while respondents in the *Politician* category gave their candidate 0.54 higher ratings, and *Dr. Politician* increased effectiveness perceptions by 0.34. Learning about the candidate's background leads voters to regard that candidate as more effective at the goal of passing legislation.

The results from Table 5-2 show that in rating a candidate's sincerity, partisanship is the most important factor, and background does not have an influence. In contrast, respondents used background as a key determinant of the candidate's potential effectiveness if elected to Congress.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF BACKGROUND AND PARTY

The differences in the effect of background between the results in no party treatment shown in Figures 5-2 through 5-4 and all treatments models in Tables 5-1 and 5-2 indicate that the candidate's partisanship is affecting perceptions of his background. Background has a stronger effect when the mock direct mail flier is shorn of references to the candidate's partisanship. The negative and significant effects of the *Democratic* and

Republican treatments provide another sign that partisanship may affect alter perceptions of background.

To test if background has differential effects across different party treatments, I ran three OLS models, with thermometer ratings as the dependent variable, separating out respondents in each of the different party treatments. The independent variables are party identification, issue handling advantage, and issue distance.[59] Figure 5-6 presents in graphic form the coefficient for the *Background* variable in each of the three models. As shown above, *Background* has a positive and significant effect in the No Party treatment. But the effect of background is similar in both the *Democrat* and *Republican* treatments. Respondents feel just over half a degree cooler to a partisan candidate, *ceteris paribus*, regardless of the candidate's party affiliation.

FIGURE 5-6 About Here

To test further the relationship between partisanship and background, I re-ran the model in Table 5-1, keeping the respondent traits variables the same. Thermometer ratings are the dependent variable, and I include a separate independent variable for each of the 15 different combinations of occupation and party in the experiment. Figure 5-7 presents the coefficients, which measure the difference with the excluded *None No Party* category, for each of the 15 treatments. For the No Party condition, the effect is positive for each of the different occupational treatments. When Candidate Kelley is a Democrat, the coefficients are less than the control group. The results are much more mixed among Republicans. Again, respondents reacted negatively to the *Politician*. The rest of the coefficients are modest, with two greater than the control group, and two below.

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[59] Since the partisanship of Candidate Kelley is held constant in the split sample models, I do not need to manipulate the party identification variables to account for the changing relationship between respondent and candidate partisanship. Also, I cannot use *Same Party* and *Opposite* Party in the No Party model. Thus, I use the traditional seven point party identification scale. The *Issue Handling Advantage* variable is dropped in the No Party model, since by definition, the candidate cannot be from a party. The full results of these models are presented in Table A5-5.

FIGURE 5-7 About Here

Absent a party cue, voters rely on background information to make judgments about the effectiveness and the favorability of candidates for office. But when voters have access to the partisanship of a candidate, they use that information as the primary means to make judgments about a candidate, and background information takes a back seat.

EXPERIENCE AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY

The results here produce three conclusions. First, background appeals by themselves increase support for a candidate. The second conclusion is that this increase happens only in the absence of a party cue. When the candidate's party affiliation is included in an appeal, the effect of background dissipates and party and issue positions play affect how voters think about a candidate. Finally, the results also show that while background has no effect on perceptions of the candidate's sincerity, background has a positive and significant on perceptions of effectiveness.

Overall, the results indicate that background appeals may not matter during a campaign, since the effect of partisanship swamps the effect of background. Of course, voters are aware of a candidate's party affiliation—it is right next to their name on the ballot. But as seen in previous chapters, political campaigns frequently discuss the background and political record of their candidate. Should one conclude that campaigns are behaving irrationally?

The answer is no. Only rarely do campaigns include the candidates' party affiliation in television advertisements and other campaign communications (Vavreck 2001). Campaigns certainly know that the party affiliation of their candidate is readily available to voters, and do not think they can hide their candidate's partisanship. The results here suggest that by avoiding partisanship in an advertisement, a campaign can, at

least temporarily, receive a background benefit. Absent party information, voters view a background appeal and update their impression of a candidate in a positive fashion. For those that have already used the candidate's party label to determine their impression of a candidate, the background appeal will have no effect. But for those who are just learning about a candidate, a background appeal prompts them to update their impression of the candidate in a favorable way. Further, while television advertisements are broadcast to a wide section of voters, they are focused primarily at persuading swing voters. These voters are, by definition, willing to look beyond a candidate's party affiliation, and thus, would be most affected by a background appeal.

So while partisanship may play the ultimate role in determining impressions of a candidate, background can also influence that impression. Campaigns use background in a way consistent with these findings, emphasizing their candidate's biography early in a campaign in an effort to create a favorable first impression.

Further, these results fit with others that show the importance of competence or authority in developing source credibility. In one of the original studies into source credibility, psychologists found that subjects were more likely to believe a scientific statement when delivered by a source wearing a lab coat (Hovland & Weiss 1951). In political communication, campaigns can use a candidate's background similarly, conferring authority, competence, and expertise on their candidate, and producing more favorable impressions of their candidate. Others have found that voters can alter their assessment based on the source's status, such as incumbency (Page et al. 1987; Kahn 1993). A background appeal can confer status and authority on a candidate who would not have it just by discussing their issue agenda. Voters care not just about what a candidate says, but their assessment of the likelihood that the candidate can implement her preferred policies once elected to office.

Cautions about the Results

While the results presented here show a connection between a candidate's occupational background and voters' perceptions of that candidate, there are several cautions about the results worthy of mention. The first is the relative modesty of the results. Despite results that are consistent with expectations regarding overall perceptions and effectiveness ratings, background has only a modest, and often statistically insignificant, effect on the dependent variables. Of course, respondents only viewed a single mailer. While respondents did look over the mail piece, the amount of information they received about the candidate is much less than they could have (or would have) received in a real world campaign. Thus, the nature of the experimental design inherently limits external validity, because respondents were not exposed to a wide variety of campaign messages, media reports, and friendly conversations about the candidates, like they could be in a real-world campaign.

The survey could also tamp down some effect that one might find in the real world. As noted, respondents were more politically aware than the average citizen.[60] Those who are the most politically sophisticated are the most able to screen out messages contrary to their own political views (Zaller 1992). This may account for the strong effects that partisanship and issue positions have on perceptions of Candidate Kelley. Also, my experiment was positioned relatively deep into the survey. Respondents had already answered questions about their views on President Bush, Congress, and a series of major political figures, their positions on a variety of important issues, and their view of which party would handle particular issues better. These previous questions may have

[60] Among respondents in the Texas module of the CCES, 89.3% claim to have voted in the 2006 general election and 54.4% claim to be "very interested in politics."

primed partisanship for respondents, increasing their reliance on Candidate Kelley's partisanship and reducing their reliance on his background.

On the other hand, respondents likely paid more attention to the experimental stimulus than they would a campaign commercial or direct mail flier. Another factor that may have led to respondents paying more attention than voters do in real world is the political sophistication of the respondents. It is likely that the respondents paid more attention to this flier and could connect what they saw in the flier to other political information more easily than if a truly random sample of the electorate was surveyed.

The experiment, by design, held issue content constant across experimental treatments. But real life campaigns will alter their issue agenda to better connect with the occupational background of their candidate. Some of this is observed in the results for the Businessman, which were hardly different from the control group in the sincerity and effectiveness ratings. But why would a Businessman care more about health care, or be more effective in passing a bill through Congress. A real-life campaign for a business owner would be more likely to emphasize his positions on issues such as taxes and jobs, which have an easier connection to his occupational background. And background is one of several credibility building mechanisms they can use to connect candidates and issues. Campaigns can try to build the credibility of their candidate through factors such as party issue ownership, party images, endorsements, and connections to local party leaders, among others. Campaigns are not limited to one mechanism in a campaign, or even in a single advertisement. More nuanced studies of background appeals should examine the role a candidate's record and occupational background plays in connecting candidates to policies.

The mock candidate presented here runs for a legislative office, and his political experience is limited to other legislative office. Voters may have different expectations

based on different offices, and the role that experience plays for the candidate here may not be the same if he ran for an executive position. In particular, voters may place a greater value on competence and effectiveness for executive office, where the candidate must not only pass policies, but implement them. Again, this is a subject worthy of attention in future research.

Each of these cautions is worthwhile to consider in light of the findings in this chapter. But regardless of these objections, the results show that background appeals, used in the right circumstance, do help campaigns win votes on election day, and the frequent use of them by political campaigns does seem a useful strategy.

Chapter 6: The Meaning of Background

In his *APSR* article "Strategy and Background in Congressional Campaigns," Patrick Sellers argues that "[c]andidate's messages reflect their record of issue positions, and voters seem to incorporate these messages into their evaluations of the candidates…When choosing campaign themes, candidates tend to emphasize issues on which they have built a record that appears favorable to voters. This kind of message more effectively wins favorable evaluations from voters than messages lacking such a record" (1998, 159).

The essential conclusion of this dissertation is the same as Sellers's—political campaigns use background appeals frequently as a means to win favorable evaluations from voters. While reaching a similar conclusion, this dissertation has expanded on Sellers' argument in four ways. First, I develop an argument as to why political campaigns have a particular incentive to emphasize the background or political record of a candidate. Second, I assess the importance of candidate background as compared to other factors in the message development process. Third, I examine how political campaigns employ their candidate's background in television advertisements. Finally, I address the question of the effectiveness of background appeals through an experimental design.

The empirical findings of this dissertation are consistent with the argument that campaigns use background appeals to reduce uncertainty while preserving ambiguity. Using background appeals prompts voters to give more credibility to a campaign message. Voters will have more confidence that a victorious candidate will work on a particular issue agenda in office. By using background appeals, campaigns can achieve

these goals without increasing the sincerity of their policy positions, allowing them to maintain their incentive for ambiguity.

Chapter 2 identifies the rational for this argument. Political campaigns face two conflicting incentives faced the political campaigns. Political campaigns benefit by making their candidate's issue positions known to voters, because it reduces uncertainty (Alvarez 1997; Downs 1957; Franklin 1991). Campaigns also benefit from remaining ambiguous in their candidate's issue positions (Shepsle 1972; Page 1976, 1978). In this dissertation, I argue that background appeals allow campaigns to meet both of these seemingly contradictory incentives in the same message. It is difficult for campaigns to effectively use another type of appeal—such as a partisan one—to meet both incentives at the same time. Chapter 2 then establishes a series of expectations to test in the following chapters. For the most part, these expectations were met.

In Chapter 3, I test the importance of background appeals in campaign planning. A series of interviews with political consultants shows that background is a vital component of message development; consultants want to show voters "who their candidate is" in an effort to overcome the skepticism and distrust that is inherent in voters. By telling voters about what their candidate has accomplished in the past (whether in or out of office), campaigns hope to improve perceptions of their candidate's sincerity and likeability. Favorable issue positions are not enough to win an election. Without a background that is capable of improving perceptions of a candidate's sincerity, likeability, and competence, a campaign faces a more difficult task in winning votes.

Chapter 4 tests whether campaigns can put these plans into action. The answer is a clear yes; nearly 80% of the advertisements aired by Senate campaigns in the 2000 and 2002 elections included a background appeal. In addition to using these appeals with frequency, campaigns avoid specifics when they make background appeals, meeting the

next expectation. I next test when campaigns use more specific background appeals. The answer is rarely. Neither incumbency nor competitiveness prompt campaigns to increase their specificity. The incentive for ambiguity is so strong that campaigns only increase the specificity of background appeals when discussing their opponent. The content of political discourse follows the predictions of Chapter 2—political campaigns use background appeals frequently, and in a manner that substitutes background information for policy specificity.

The final expectation holds that background appeals will produce more favorable evaluations among voters. I find confirmatory evidence that background appeals do have a positive and significant effect on perceptions of a candidate. Respondents also viewed the candidate with an occupational background as more effective. While party labels wash out the positive effects of background, the lack of party labels in most campaign advertising indicates that campaigns can use background appeals to allow voters to update their impressions of a candidate.

The broad lesson of these findings is that candidate background is an essential element of political campaigns. Political consultants include the candidates' backgrounds as an essential component of their campaign message, and select an issue agenda based on its compatibility with their candidate's background. Voters use the background of the candidate as a source credibility mechanism, giving higher ratings to candidates when they learn about his background. Campaigns are thus not just about party platforms, candidate positioning and 12-point plans. Instead, political campaigns are contests of trust. Do voters trust a candidate to have their interests at heart? and do voters trust that candidate to be effective in representing their community. Voters start skeptical of politicians. Emphasizing issue agendas of tax cuts or increased health care spending cannot, in and of themselves, overcome this distrust. Campaigns must make voters

believe their candidate understands their problems before they can convince them they know how to solve it. Only by telling voters about their candidate's past can they win their trust to work for them in the future.

The rest of the chapter explores the implications of the findings of this dissertation. I first sketch out the implications for political campaigns, then for political scientists who study campaigns and elections, and then for the health of American democracy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

In order for campaigns to win the next term in office, they must talk about their candidate's past. The importance of retrospective information in campaigns is, in many ways, curious. Voters will place a candidate into office in the future, and one might hypothesize that voters would (and maybe should) be interested in a candidate's policy proposals. This information will tell voters what a candidate will likely do if elected. An elected official can only change the future, which would seem to provide an incentive to focus on future plans. But the uncertainty of the future makes the unchanging past relevant in political campaigns. A candidate can deliver a campaign speech full of specific policy proposals, only to enact a completely different set of policies once in office.

The unchanging past offers more certainty to voters. For incumbents, their record in their previous term of office allows voters to assume she will act in a similar way if reelected to another term. Examining a non-incumbent's record in another political office allows voters to infer similar actions if elected. For campaigns for inexperienced candidates, the ability to show "who your candidate is" increases the credibility they grant to a candidate. Background appeals work as a means of demonstrating the

authenticity of a candidate. Campaigns start with the premise that voters regard anything they say with intense skepticism. The ability to convince voters that their candidate's views are more than mere campaign rhetoric is essential to winning electoral victory. And to do that, campaigns must make appeals based on their candidate's past.

Information about a candidate's past can affect not only perceptions of the credibility of a candidate, but also their competence. The future brings uncertainty not only in the potential to break a campaign promise, but also in the types of issues an office holder will face. In particular, those who run for executive office may face a major emergency (natural disaster or riot for governors and mayors; terrorist attack or international crisis for a president). While the unexpected nature of the emergency means that voters cannot consider specific responses in evaluating a candidate, voters can use retrospective information to predict how candidates might react to unexpected developments.

Campaigns can reduce uncertainty through a couple of different means—emphasizing policy stands (Franklin 1991), and emphasizing partisan and ideological themes (Popkin 1991). But the primary method campaigns use to reduce uncertainty is background appeals. By using information about the candidate's background in place of specific policy appeals, campaigns can avoid angering those who disagree with their policy stands. Thus, background appeals hold a particular appeal to political campaigns, allowing them to meet their incentives for uncertainty and ambiguity. If a candidate's background is not appropriate for the office sought, or is not one that easily creates credibility and likeability among voters, then a campaign will have a much more difficult time wooing voters. The results here suggest that voters may never give the candidate the credibility needed to listen to her policy positions. Thus, campaigns benefit by emphasizing the background of their candidate. Which is a good thing for campaigns,

since emphasizing the background of their candidate is at the heart of the message strategy of contemporary campaigns.

But as seen here, campaigns do more than just mention their candidate's biography. Campaigns try to identify an issue agenda that matches their local district, the national issue agenda, and the background of their candidate. Some candidates have backgrounds that easily lend themselves to certain districts and certain national conditions. Others do not have a biography or political record that their campaign can use to enhance the credibility and likeability of their candidate.

The importance of "who a candidate" suggests that candidate entry is the vital state in determining the shape of an election. If a candidate with whose background can credibly connect to the issues of the day and the people of a district enters a race (either as an incumbent or a challenger), her chances of winning are substantially greater than if a less credible candidate enters. This is the central insight of the congressional elections literature. Incumbents should win most elections, but when a "quality challenger" enters, who has organizational support, fund raising capacity, name identification and political skills to present their message to voters, a competitive race will develop (Jacobson & Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989, 1990, 2004). In addition to their organizational skills and familiarity, the centrality of the candidate to campaign messages indicates that we can add a credible message to the list of attributes "quality challengers" bring when they decide to run for office.

In the current day, campaigns are "candidate centered," and the fate of the candidate herself is the primary, if not the solitary, factor in campaign decision making. No longer do local party leaders control the campaigns of all their nominees. Instead, a team of personal advisors, consultants, and staffers join with the candidate to autonomously guide and manage the campaign. Modern day candidates are self-

motivated, deciding to run on their own, and not at the behest of party leaders or recruitment efforts (Ehrenhalt 1991). Candidates, not parties, are at the center of own campaign organizations; starting such organizations at the beginning of the campaign, and keeping them going between elections (Herrnson 2004).

The results here show we can add the message of the campaign to this long list of campaign elements where the candidate is central. Political consultants are trying to sell the candidate. Other message elements—district demography, the national issue agenda, party reputations, etc.—interact with the candidate's own personal background, reputation, and skills to determine the message. But essential to each of these other elements if the candidate herself. A nationally important issue can be important in a particular US House election, but only if that issue can be personalized to the candidate.

The ability to make background appeals is not equal across all candidates. One group of candidate who are particularly advantaged by this are incumbents. For example, legislative incumbents have usually taken a long series of votes on a wide variety of issues, allowing them to establish a past position on an issue, even if it is not on an issue high on their list of priorities. If the national issue agenda changes, incumbent campaigns can use these past votes as part of a background appeal. Certainly, the voting record of an incumbent candidate is a double-edged sword. Their opponent can use obscure votes to trump up attacks against a candidate. But voting records allow incumbent campaigns more flexibility in changing their issue agenda to fit with the changing times because their voting record allows them to make background appeals on a wide variety of issues. Challenging campaigns often do not have such a luxury.

The findings about the frequency of background appeals and their lack of specificity are robust here. Despite that, these findings are limited because they focus on only one medium of campaign communication—television advertising. I chose to use

television advertising for both theoretical reasons—campaign advertising is the most consumed form of campaign communication among contemporary voters—and practical ones—an archive of television advertising is widely (and cheaply) available to scholars. Other forms of political communication are targeted to narrower audiences, and might allow campaigns to take more specific positions knowing that only a particular subset of voters will view a direct mail flier or particular pages on their website. Future studies should compare the willingness of campaigns to make background appeals and the level of specificity of these appeals across different media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

The focus on background by political consultants of background stands in contrast to the focus on issues in the campaigns and elections literature. Two perspectives on campaign issue agenda have developed. The first perspective focuses on how campaigns use issues to position themselves on an ideological spectrum. The issue positioning perspective is based on the spatial model, first developed by Anthony Downs (1957), and assumes that voters choose the candidate whose issue position is closest to their own. The key for campaigns in the spatial model is to position their candidate optimally to receive a majority of the votes cast on election day, and scholars have identified the important role that issue positions plays in determining the content and outcome of political campaigns (Wright & Berkman 1986).[61]

The results presented here indicate the difficulty that campaigns have in "positioning" their candidate at the ideal location to win votes. The need for "passion"

[61] For example, the ideological and issue position of different campaigns correspond well to the ideology of a district. Democratic districts feature more liberal candidates, and Republican districts feature more conservative candidates, for both parties (Burden 2004; Ansolabehere, Snyder, & Stewart 2001). Incumbents whose voting record strays from the ideology of their district are more vulnerable on election day (Brady, Cogan, & Canes-Wrone 2002).

and "authenticity" that consultants identified indicates that trying to position their candidate can enhance the skepticism that voters already possess. The lack of specific policy information in political advertising indicates that campaigns do not try to find the ideal place on the ideological spectrum. Political campaigns take their candidate's issue positions as a given, and identify the best way to sell the issue priorities of their candidate to voters.

That political practitioners use background to highlight favorable considerations fits with the second perspective in political science on campaign strategy—the salience model. Political psychologists argue that campaigns hope to prime issues on which voters have favorable considerations for their candidate in an effort to increase the weight a voter places on that issue or characteristic in making their vote choice (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Mendelsohn 1996; Druckman 2004; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004). For example, the two major parties should emphasize the issues that their parties own (Petrocik 1996), and thus increase the salience of that issue. Campaigns do not change their candidate's issue positions, but change instead issue emphases.

The importance of candidate background in political campaigns fits well with the salience perspective. Campaigns wish to highlight the strengths of their candidates, and use background as a demonstration of those strengths. Campaigns also use background information to provide credibility on particular issue positions, an example of emphasizing favorable issues (in a favorable manner, too).

Previous work in the salience perspective (outside of the notable exception of Sellers 1998) only identifies national or partisan rationales for emphasizing favorable issues. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) argue for the "riding the wave" hypothesis, in which campaigns focus on issues which are highly salient to voters at a particular time.

Campaigns risk losing credibility if they fail to address such an important issue. Issue ownership can provide campaigns with a set of favorable issues and traits related to the reputation of their political party (Petrocik 1996; Hayes 2005). Campaigns therefore emphasize issues on which their party's long standing reputation gives them advantages over their opponent (Spiliotes & Vavreck 2002; Brasher 2003; Petrocik 1996; Simon 2002). Neither of these explanations, though, take into account the effect of a candidate's biography or political record in account as either an independent or mediating explanation for the issue agenda of campaigns.

This dissertation argues in favor of the need to take background more seriously as a source of campaign strategy. Political consultants consider candidate background to be at least equally important to the issue agenda or district demography in determining the message strategy of their campaigns. Accounting for background may also help give more context to some of the findings in the campaign issue literature. Campaigns are quite willing to discuss issues owned by the other party, even in expensive forms of communications such as television advertising. From a strict issue ownership perspective, such trespassing is unwise, as the opposing party's reputation on their issue reduces the effectiveness of such an appeal (Norpoth & Buchanan 1992). But if campaigns are not playing off the reputation of their political party, perhaps they are playing off the reputation of their candidate. The wide diversity of campaign issue agendas, and their independence from other corroborating factors, may be explained in part by the wide variety of individuals from diverse backgrounds who run for Congress (Sulkin & Evans 2006).

My argument here is not that issues are unimportant in political campaigns. To do so would be to overlook mounds of evidence that show the important role that issues play in campaign strategy and voter decision making. But the relationship between candidates

and voters is not the simple utility calculation of the Downsian model. Voters are not calculating their "Euclidean distance" from a political candidate and choosing the smaller one.[62] Instead, voters want to know what a candidate is like, and campaigns are quite eager to tell them. The relationship is centered on likeability and credibility. Instead of focusing on what specific policies candidates propose or specific votes in the legislature, voters focus on their ability to trust candidate to solve problems. This relationship is more emotional than assumed by political science models.

The short shrift given to the role of background in political campaigns means that our understanding of how issues work is incomplete. Campaigns must sell voters on both the personal characteristics of their candidate, as demonstrated by their background, as well as their policy proposals. Thus, future research should examine the role that candidate background plays in determining the issue agenda of political campaigns. The results here suggest that campaign use their candidate's background to determine the issue agenda for their campaign, in combination with district demographics and the national issue agenda. Future studies can examine how candidate background affects the choice of issues in campaign advertising, and how background interacts with the national issue agenda and district demographics to influence issue choices for political campaigns.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

Democracies place the ultimate repository of political power with the *demos*. In the ideal, "the people" know not just the names of the candidates, but also their issue positions and priorities. Elections should connect the opinions of the public with the policy choices of their elected representatives. This connection, though, is tenuous if

[62] And to be fair, no spatial modeler believes that voters make these calculations in a mathematical fashion. In fact, Enelow & Munger (1993) find that candidate reputation produces divergence.

voters lack knowledge about the policy positions of the candidates they are choosing for office.

The question of how much political knowledge is possessed by the electorate has been at the heart of the study of political behavior from its outset. The Columbia studies, headed by Paul Lazarsfeld, were inspired by fears demagogic politicians could use new technologies (radio and film) as a method to manipulate voters. In many ways, the question of voter knowledge has been the central question in the study of political behavior. The seminal studies are united in finding low levels of political knowledge among the American electorate (see Delli Carpini & Keeter 1997 for a review). These studies have identified a long series of information shortcuts, from party identification (Campbell et al. 1960) to retrospective evaluations of incumbent party performance (Fiorina 1978) and economic conditions (Kiewiet 1983) to elite cutes (Zaller 1992) to symbolic events (Popkin 1991), that voters use to make sense of the political environment and to decide for whom to vote.

These studies have examine the question of voter knowledge from the perspective of what voters learn. In this study, I turn the question around and ask what information do political campaigns provide to voters. Campaigns, after all, have a strong incentive to inform voters. The results show that campaigns provide little specific information about the policies they intend to pursue in office. Voters learn little about politics in part because the most common form of communication aimed directly to them gives them little information to learn about.

As a result, the electorate has great difficulty in holding politicians accountable for their actions in office. Campaign advertisements present little information that voters can later use to determine if a candidate has met the promises made in previous campaigns. Voters would like to know what a candidate plans to do in office, and

punish candidates when they are uncertain of their plans in office. Instead, campaigns are able to successfully use background information in the place of policy commitment, wearing down voter's natural aversion to ambiguous positions.

That candidates do not have to commit to particular policy proposals during a campaign provides them flexibility when they enter office and attempt to represent their constituents. Officeholders whose campaigns used background to reduce uncertainty among voters, rather than specific policy proposals, have not pre-committed to particular policy options. They are able to adapt to new information and changing circumstances. Representatives who have not made specific policy commitments can more easily seek compromise with other stake holders.

On the other hand, campaigns are willing to provide specific information to voters when discussing information about the record of their opponent. During hotly contested elections, which feature the most negative advertising (Kahn and Kenney 1997), voters can learn a great deal about the record of a candidate by watching the television advertisements paid for by the opposing campaigns. Geer (2006) has found that negative advertisements in presidential elections are more likely to discuss policy issues than personal traits. My data show that even within policy discussions, negative and contrasting advertisements provide voters with more specific information. The results also imply that accountability in elections occurs not through voters remembering what an incumbent's campaign said in previous elections, but through attacks made by an opposing campaign. Of course, campaigns have little reason to promote their own candidate's shifts in policy positions. The challenging campaign is the entity with the most to gain by "holding accountable" the incumbent.

Negative campaigns are pilloried in the both the academic (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Jamieson 1992) and popular press (Kamber 1997). But the results here join

with other in showing that negativity does provide some benefit to voters. Negative advertisements provide more specific information to voters about the workings of their government, and the actions of office holders. Through receiving such information, voters can hold these office holders accountable.

The results also say much about who runs for office. As mentioned above, the entry decisions made by potential candidates—whether an incumbent runs for re-election, whether "quality" challengers or open seat candidate emerge—plays the largest role in determining the competitiveness and intensity of a congressional election. The need for a credible background also affects who can run for office. In particular, campaigns for candidates who are not successful in previous jobs, whether in previous elected office or in the private sector, face a steeper climb to electoral victory. On par, the bias toward successful background is a positive. The correlation between job success and other worthy attributes, such as knowledge, leadership skill, and judgment, means that office holders tend toward the most qualified. In many ways, it is heartening that those who fail (or even hover at the middle) at other professions have a difficult time moving into elective office as a means of personal advancement.

On the other hand, disparities in educational and economic equality means that merit alone does not why a person succeeds at a particular job. As a result, the bias toward background in political office is also a bias toward the upper class. Those who begin life less able to gain the education, skills, and contacts needed to succeed at their jobs are less likely to run or win office.

YOU ARE THE MESSAGE

Roger Ailes (1988, 28) says that to succeed, the sender of a message must be embrace the environment to which she is sending that message, "The principle here is not

to change yourself because the environment changes, but rather to become totally comfortable with yourself wherever you are. Once you realize that *you* are the message, you can transmit that message to anyone and be pretty successful at it."

The findings in this dissertation agree. The best candidates match the story of their life to the issues of concern to the people of a particular district. Such candidates do not adapt themselves to a new district, but demonstrate who they are, and transmit that message to voters. Political campaigns can offer candidates a way to package themselves in a more positive light. But they can only change the candidate around the margins, identifying the best stories and best evidence that demonstrates who the candidate is, using the techniques of modern media to highlight their message. But in the end, who the candidate is the biggest influence on what their campaigns can say about them.

Tables & Figures

Table 3-1: List of Political Consultants Interviewed

Name	Consulting Firm	Party	Date
James Aldrete	Message, Audience, Presentation	Democrat	May 22, 2006
Christian Archer	The Archer Group	Democrat	May 18, 2006
Barry Barnes	Terris, Barnes, & Walters	Democrat	March 26, 2007
Brian Berry	The Strategy Group	Republican	May 11, 2006
Mike Blizzard	Grassroots Solutions	Democrat	May 23, 2006
Marc Campos	Campos Communications	Democrat	June 1, 2006
Matthew Dowd	Chief Strategist, Bush-Cheney '04	Republican	February 14, 2006
Kelly Fero	Fero Hewitt, Inc	Democrat	July 11, 2006
Wayne Hamilton	San Jacinto Group	Republican	May 16, 2006
Fred Harris	Strategic Perception, Inc.	Republican	March 22, 2007
Jeff Hewitt	Fero Hewitt, Inc	Democrat	July 6, 2006
Robert Jara	Campaign Strategies, Inc.	Democrat	May 31, 2006
Dan McClung	Campaign Strategies, Inc.	Democrat	June 1, 2006
Pat McFerron	CMA Strategies	Republican	February 14, 2007
Kathryn McNeil	Campaign Manager	Democrat	June 12, 2006
Chadwick Melder	CAMCO Consulting	Republican	November 17, 2006
Spencer Neumann	Neumann Consulting	Republican	June 11, 2006
Jeff Norwood	Anthem Media	Republican	May 22, 2006
Paul Novak	Novak Media, Inc.	Democrat	November 16, 2006
Todd Olson	Olson-Shuvalov	Republican	May 19, 2006
Celinda Provost	Campaign Manager	Democrat	May 22, 2006
Kevin Shuvalov		Republican	May 11, 2006
Mustafa Tameez	Mustafa Tameez Consulting	Democrat	May 31, 2006
Chris Turner	Murphy-Turner	Republican	May 19, 2006
David Weeks	Weeks & Co.	Republican	May 27, 2006
Robert Wickers	Dresner, Wickers, & Associates	Republican	January 29, 2007

Table 3-2: Interview Questionnaire

What process do you go through with each candidate/race to decide the theme of the campaign and the message of individual communications?
What role does the *demographic makeup* of a district/state play in assessing your message strategy?
What role does the *partisan makeup* of a district/state play in assessing your message strategy? Does this encourage or discourage the use of particular issues, or particular ways of discussing an issue?
In determining your message/theme for a local race, what role does the *national issue agenda* play? issue agenda beyond your control?
What role does the background of a candidate, both in and out of politics, play in assessing your message strategy? What questions do you ask a candidate about her/his background? What research do you conduct about your candidate's background? What research do you conduct about your opponent's background? In what circumstances would you not talk about your candidate's background? In what circumstances do you talk about the opponent's background? How important is a candidate's background in selecting the issues you want to emphasize? What other factors are important—party standing, the national agenda, etc.?

Table 3-3. Responses to Question: What process do you go through with each candidate/race to decide the theme of the campaign and the message of individual communications?

Response	**N**
Candidate Background	19
Combined with District Factors	5
Combined with Issue Environment	4
Combined with Opponent's Background	2
Combined with District *and* Issues	2
District Factors	8
Combined with Issues	2
Issue Environment	5
Combined with Campaign Mechanics	1
Opponent's Background	2
Campaign Mechanics (Money, Name Identification, etc.)	3

N = 26; Multiple responses to the question were coded, so results do not sum to 26.

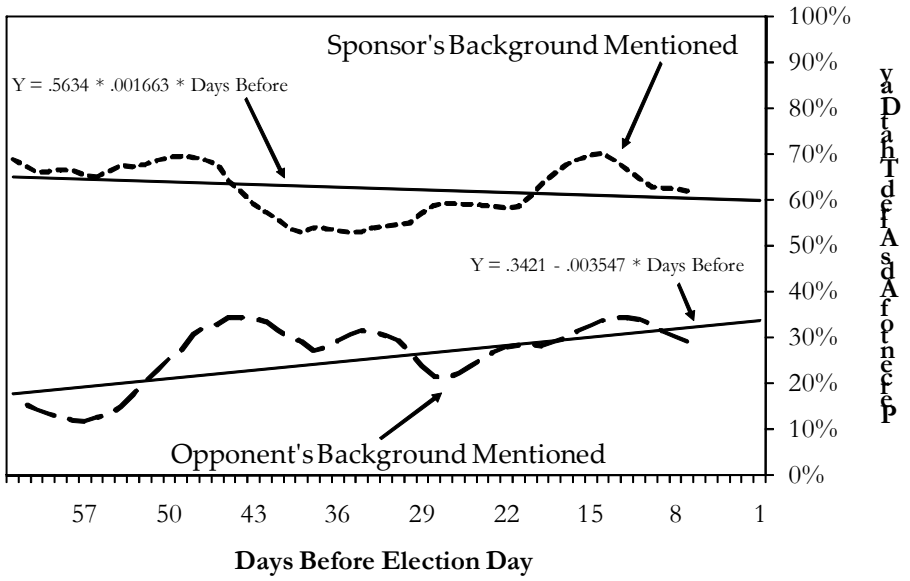
Table 4-1. Use of Record in Political Advertisements, 2000 & 2002 Senate Elections

	% of Ads Aired
Any Background Mentioned	78.9
Sponsor's Background Mentioned	61.4
As Incumbent:	33.0
In Other Political Office:	28.0
In the Private Sector	5.8
General Appeals to Experience	4.0
Biography	5.9
Opponent's Background Mentioned	28.2
As Incumbent:	9.6
In Other Political Office:	17.3
In the Private Sector	3.0
Observations	268,681

Individual advertisements can use the candidates' records in various ways, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Figure 4-1. Seven Day Moving Averages and Linear Trend for Background Usage, 2000 & 2002 Senate Elections

a. 2000 Campaign, September 6-November 6



b. 2002 Campaign, September 3-November 4

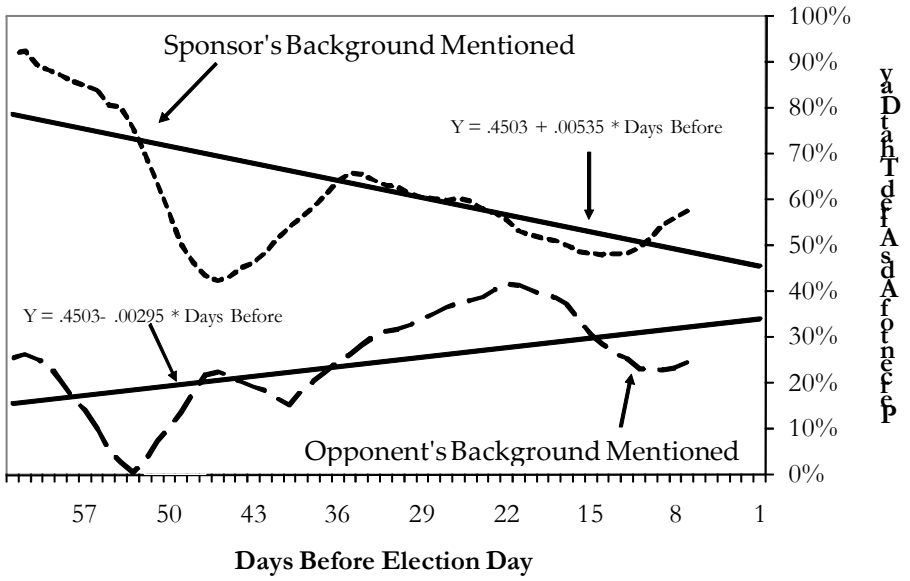


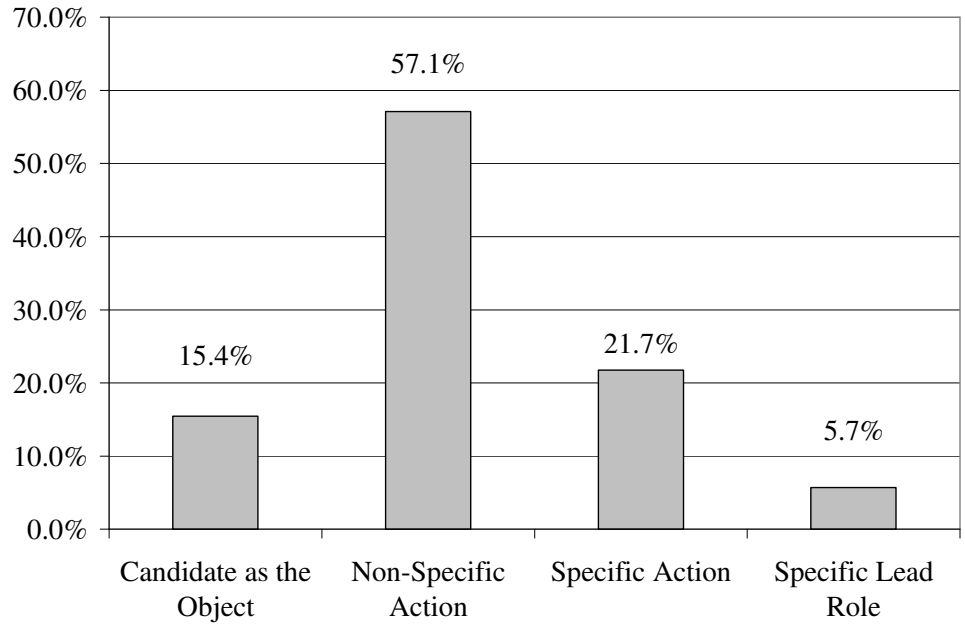
Table 4-2. Categories for Verb and Object Use

Verb Category	Definition	Example
Candidate as the Object	Verbs in which the candidate is the object, and not the subject of the verb. Action is being done to the candidate, not by him or her	Has been called Became aware Has been
Non-specific Action	Verbs in which the candidate takes action, but the action is not specifically related to the work of government	Fought/is fighting Stood up Works hard
Specific Action	Verbs in which the candidate is taking specific action in government	Vote/voted Proposed
Specific Lead Role	Verbs in which the candidate has taken the lead role in passing a bill or implementing a government policy	Wrote Authored Created

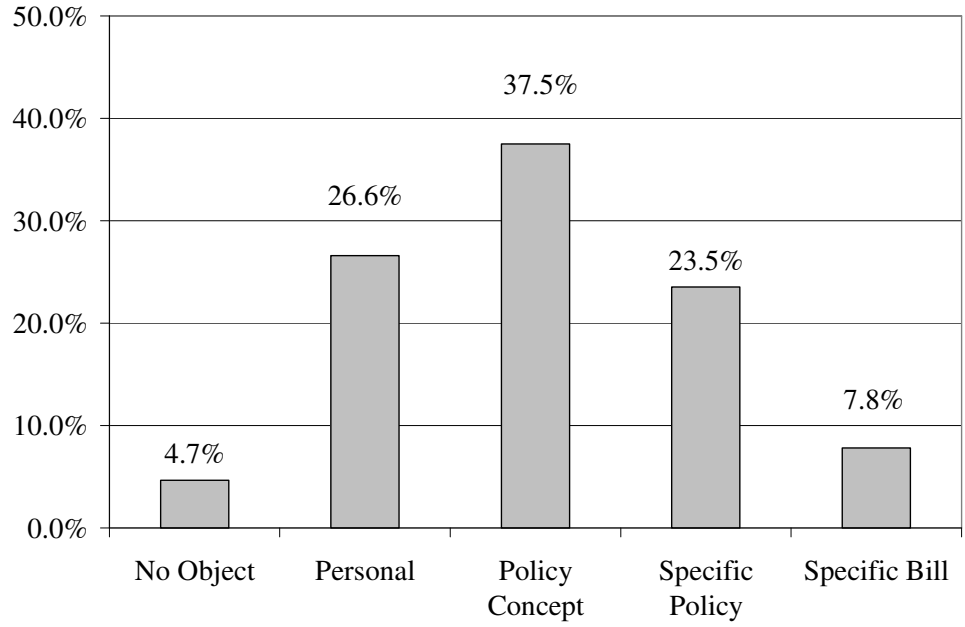
Object Category	Definition	Example
No Object	Verbs which did not have any object	
Personal	Objects which do not deal with government policies, usually focused on personal characteristics	Working for what is best Learned growing up Common sense solutions
Policy Concept	Objects that reference a policy concept, but which do not include any specific information about how the policy works	Health care Tax cuts Balancing the budget
Specific Policy	Objects which refer to a more specific government policy, or that explain how the government policy would work	School choice vouchers The marriage tax Lockbox legislation
Specific Bill	Objects that refer to the name of a specific government policy or the name of a bill	Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act Breast Cancer Coalition Aimee's Law

Figure 4-2. Verb and Object Usage in Background Appeals, 2000 & 2002 Senate Elections

a. Verb Usage, All Campaigns



b. Object Usage, All Campaigns



n = 895,228

Table 4-3. Use of Background in Advertisements Aired in the 2000 & 2002 Senate Election, Among All Advertisement Aired

	Sponsor's Background Mentioned	Opponent's Background Mentioned	Ads Aired
All Campaigns	79	29	243,735
By Sponsor's Experience			
Incumbent	77	20	85,389
Held Statewide Office	70	34	43,514
Member of Congress	59	36	58,496
Local Office/State Legislature	42	15	12,180
None	26	36	39,493
By Opponent's Experience			
Incumbent (*i.e.* Challengers)	54	41	53,149
Held Statewide Office	60	24	37,741
Member of Congress	59	32	69,269
Local Office/State Legislature	80	16	21,818
None	64	23	55,982
By Sponsor's Status			
Incumbent	77	20	85,389
Challenger	54	41	53,149
Open Seat Candidate	51	30	100,531
By Experience Advantage			
Sponsoring Candidate	78	22	135,381
Neither Candidate	49	21	38,111
Opposing Candidate	46	33	100,189

Note: Cell Entries are the percentage of all advertisements aired that discusses either the sponsoring candidate's background or the opposing candidate's background for each category. The total number of advertisements aired in each category is in the fourth column.

Table 4-4. Use of Record in 2000 & 2002 Senate Election, as Mean Percentage of Entire Advertising Universe for Campaigns

	Sponsor's Background Mentioned	Opponent's Background Mentioned	Campaigns
All Campaigns	59	25	93
By Sponsor's Experience			
Incumbent	75	13	40
Held Statewide Office	62	38	18
Member of Congress	52	27	17
Local Office/State Legislature	40	36	8
None	23	42	13
By Opponent's Experience			
Held Statewide Office	61	20	16
Member of Congress	58	31	17
Local Office/State Legislature	78	9	11
None	67	8	20
By Sponsor's Status			
Incumbent	75	13	40
Challenger	44	40	28
Open Seat Candidate	50	26	25
By Experience Advantage			
Sponsoring Candidate	74	13	50
Neither Candidate	51	24	7
Opposing Candidate	39	40	36

Note: Cell Entries are the mean percentage of advertisements that discuss either the sponsoring candidate's background or the opposing candidate's background for each campaign in the appropriate category. The total number of campaigns in each category is in the fourth column.

Table 4-5. Use of Candidate Background on a Campaign Level

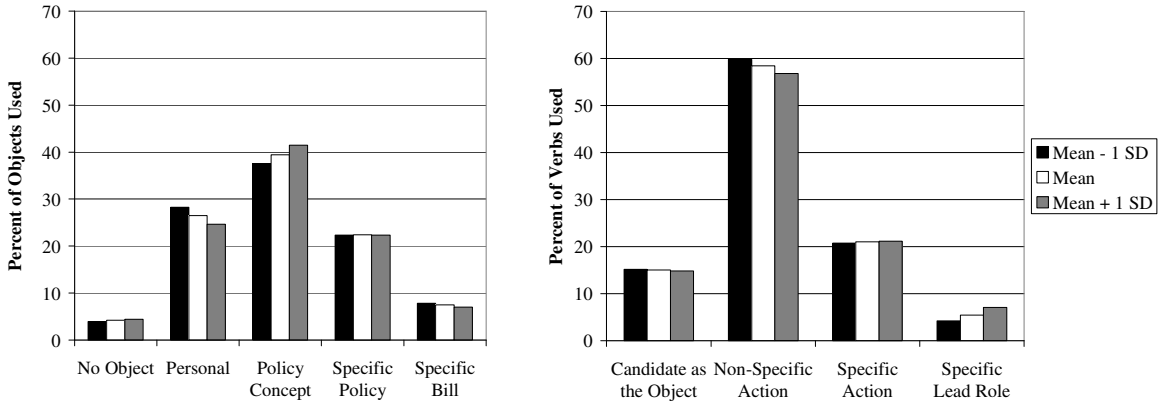
	Sponsor's Background Mentioned	Opponent's Background Mentioned
Competitiveness	0.13 (0.15)	0.34* (0.15)
Sponsor's Experience		
Incumbent	40.69** (11.29)	7.95 (11.45)
Statewide	37.83** (9.54)	11.09 (9.68)
Congress	32.54** (9.82)	-6.09 (9.96)
Local	30.13* (11.31)	-1.20 (11.47)
Experience Advantage	12.02** (4.35)	-15.36** (4.41)
Republican	-6.65 (5.37)	2.17 (5.45)
Year 2000	7.11 (4.94)	-3.84 (5.01)
Constant	13.08 (15.26)	-4.02 (15.47)
R^2	0.45	0.30

N = 93; Dependent variable is the percentage of aired advertisements that mentioned the particular type of background per campaign
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

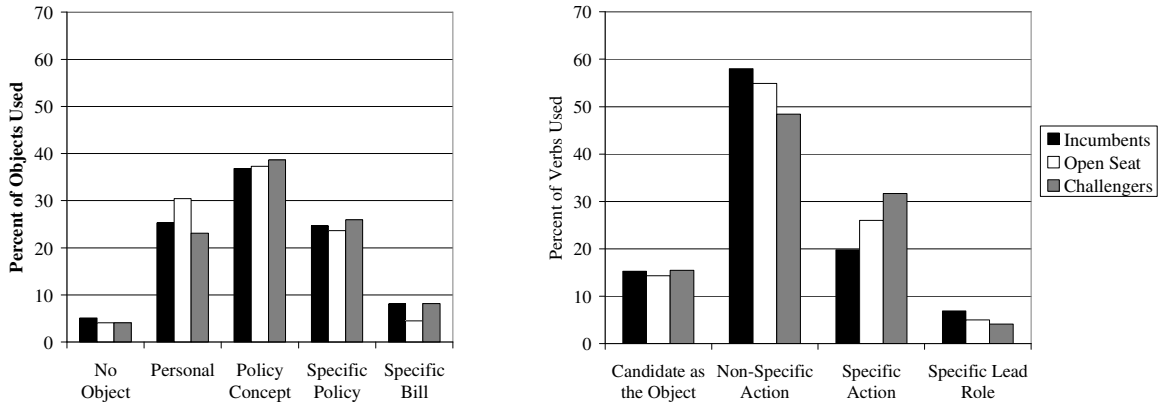
Figures 4-3 a-c. Predicted Probabilities of Background Appeal Specificity; 2000 & 2002 Senate Elections

Objects **Verbs**

a. By Competitiveness



b. By Candidate Status



c. By Which Candidate's Background is Mentioned

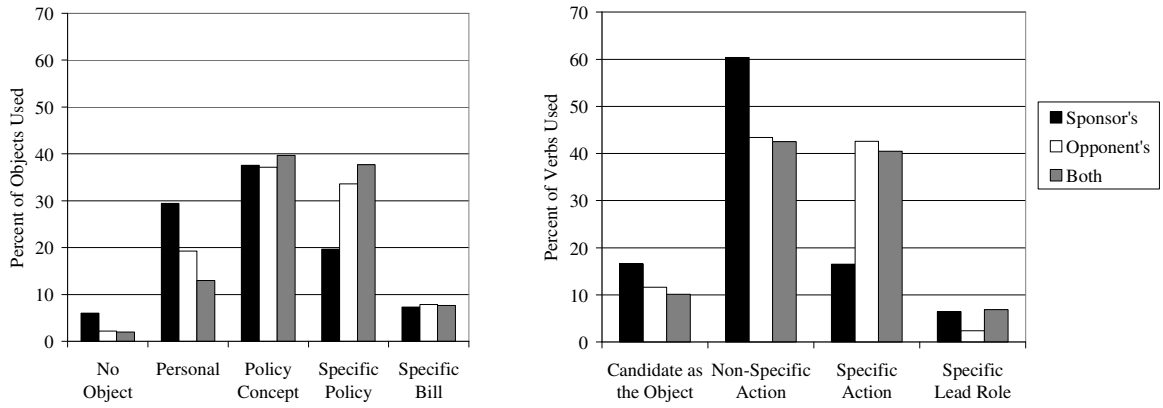


Figure 5-1. Mock Direct Mail Piece, Version "Both Democrat"

Front

Back

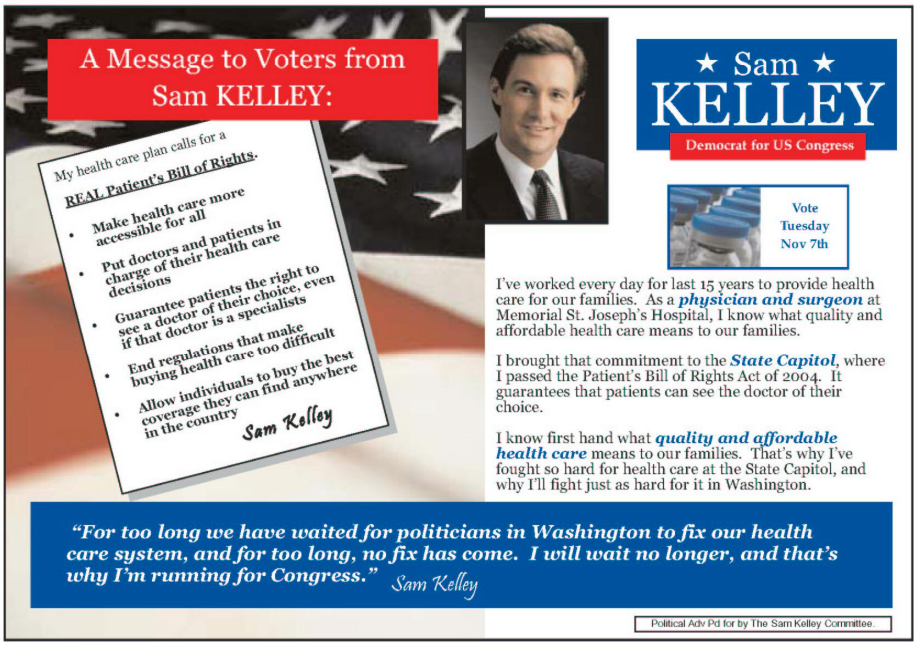
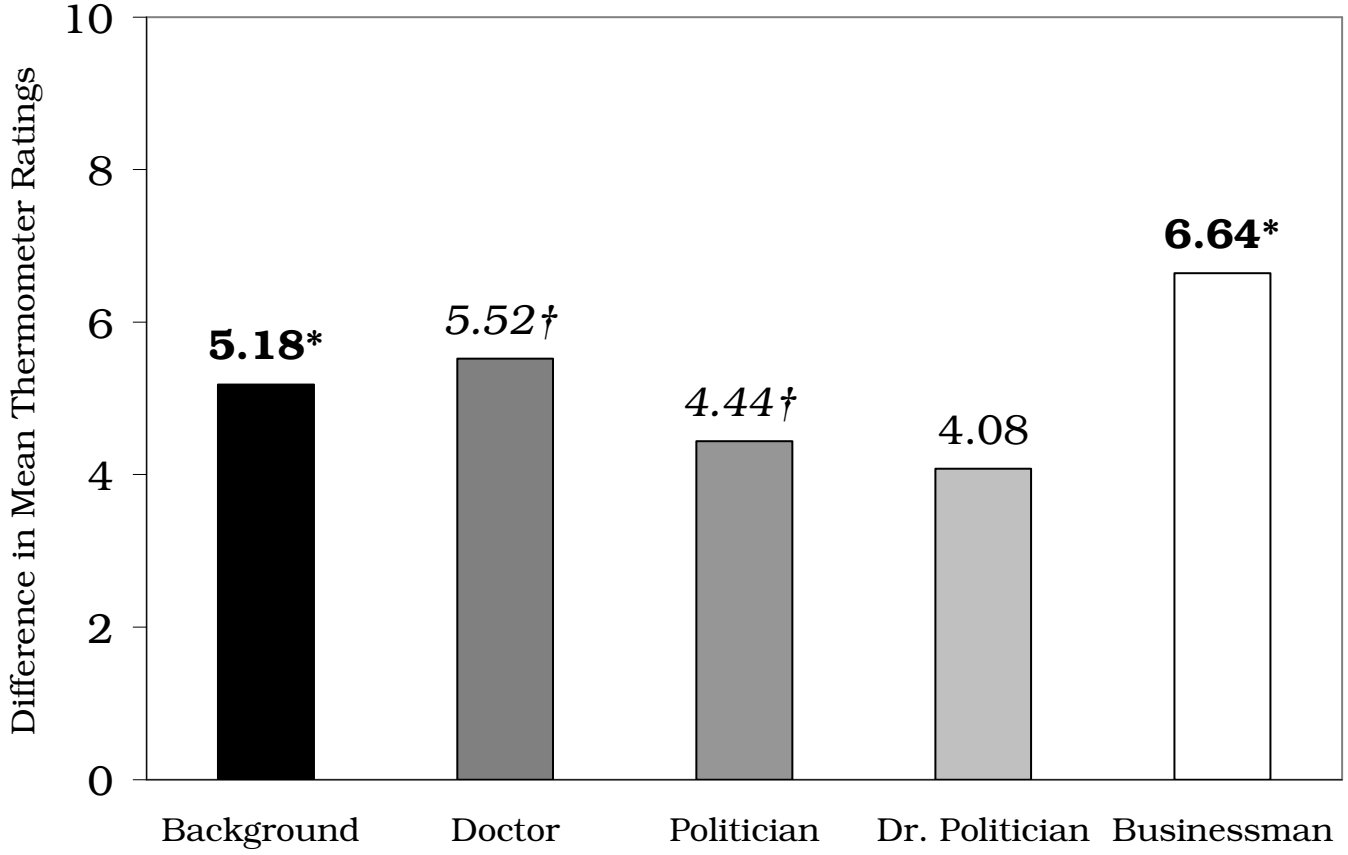
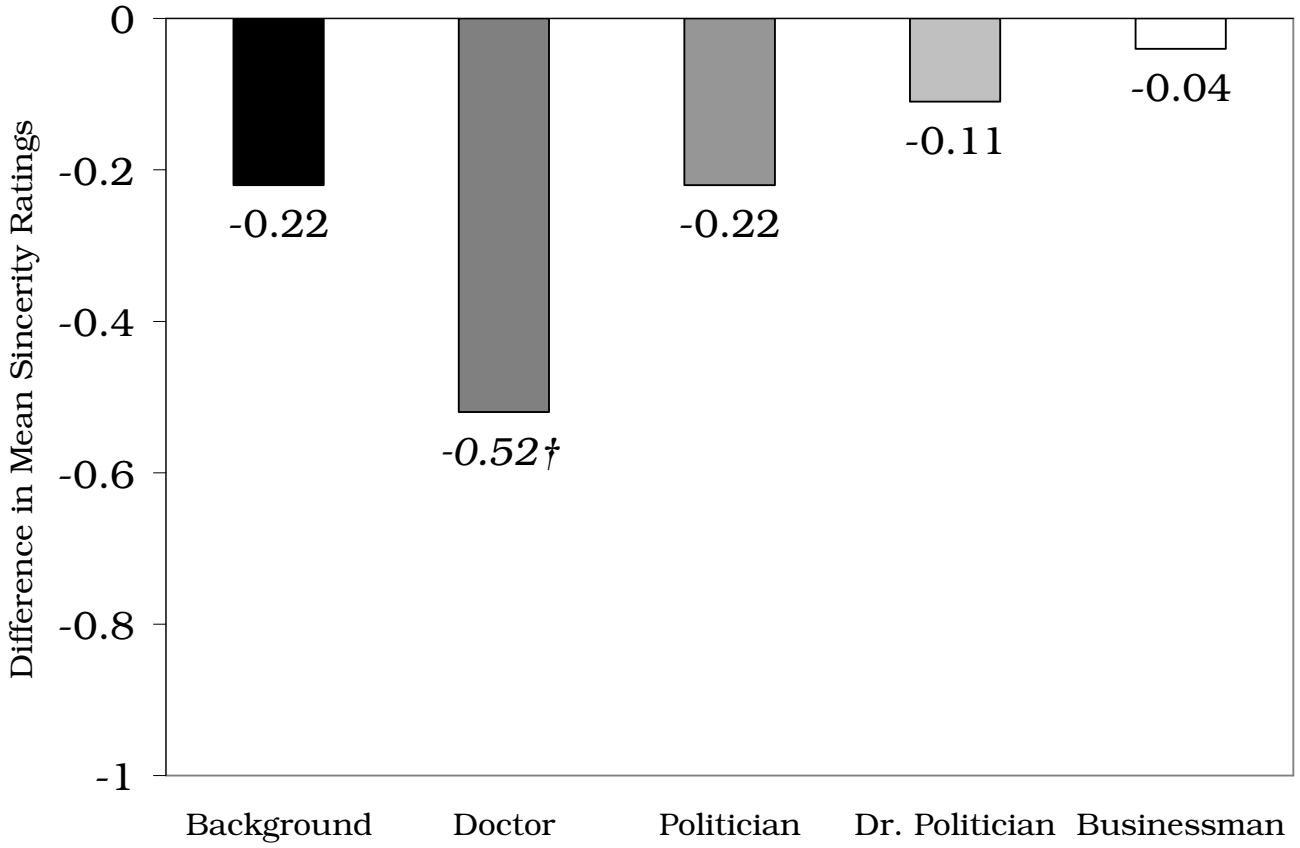


Figure 5-2. Difference in Mean Thermometer Ratings from Control Group. No Party for Candidate.



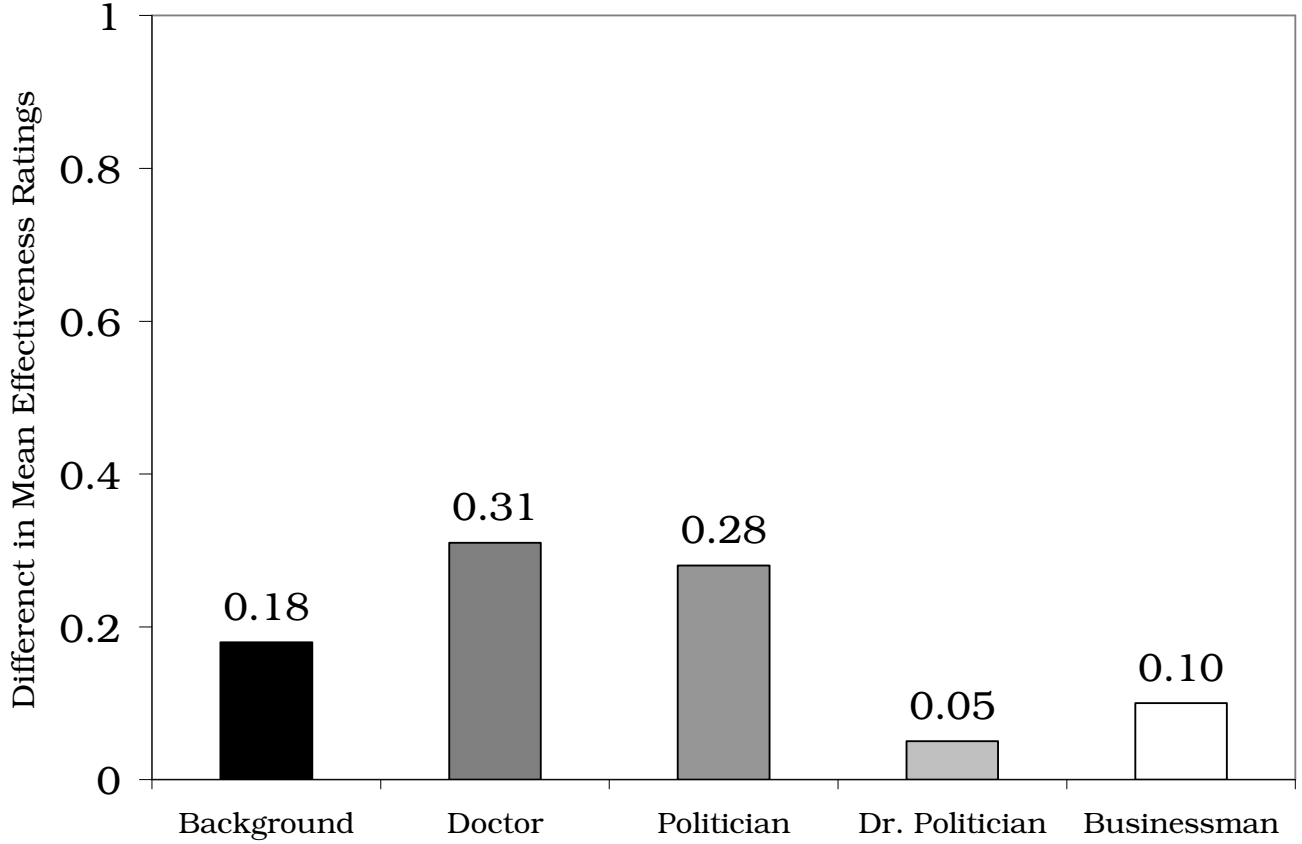
Note: n = 331; * = p < .05; † = p < .10. Background Variable combines the four occupational treatments. Dependent variable: Respondents' thermometer ratings of the candidate on a 101-point (0 to 100) scale

Figure 5-3. Difference of Mean Sincerity Ratings from Control Group. No Party for Candidate.



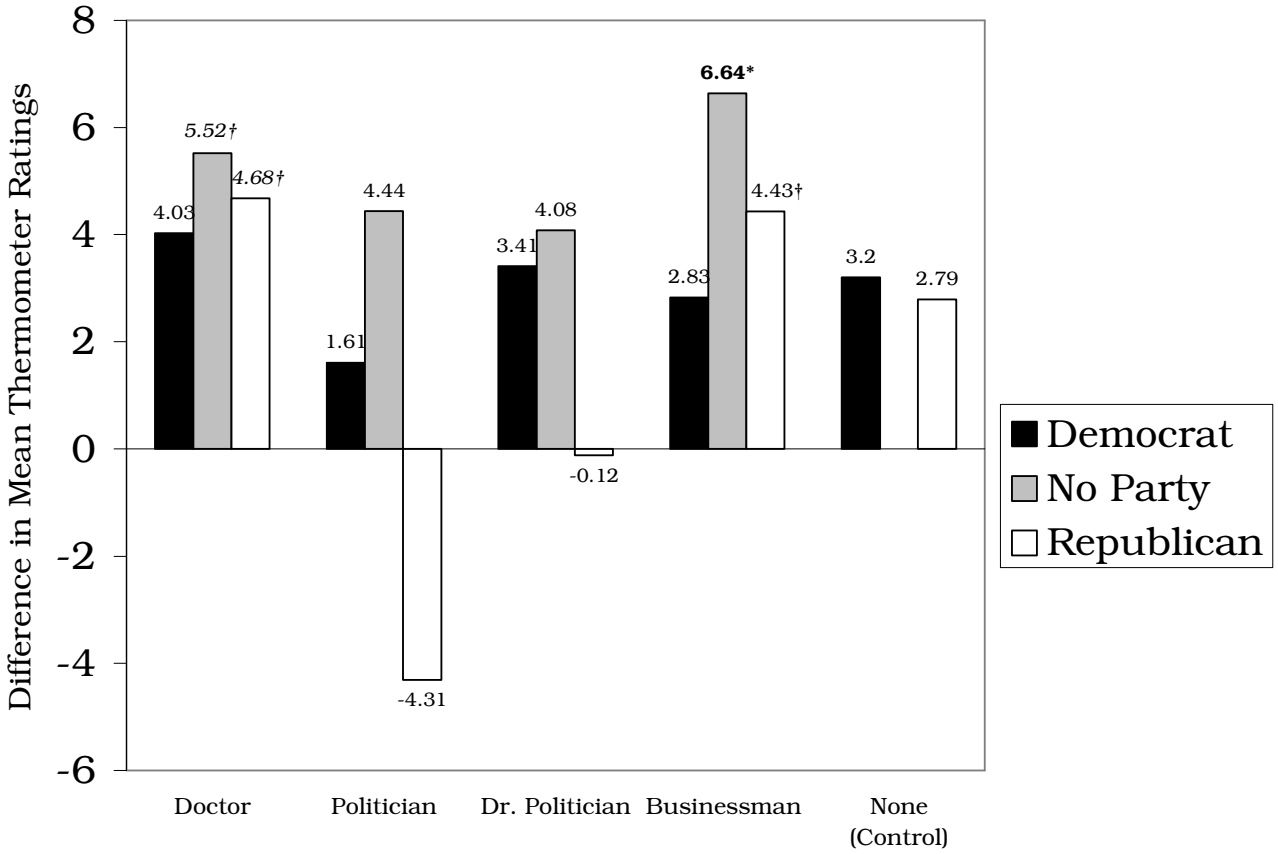
Note: n = 331; * = p < .05; † = p < .10. Background Variable combines the four occupational treatments. Dependent variable: Respondents' sincerity ratings of the candidate on an 11 point (0 to 10) scale

Figure 5-4. Difference in Effectiveness Ratings from Control Group. No Party for Candidate.



Note: n = 331; * = p < .05; † = p < .10. Background Variable combines the four occupational treatments. Dependent variable: Respondents' effectiveness ratings of the candidate on an 11 point (0 to 10) scale

Figure 5-5. Difference in Thermometer Ratings from Control Group. All Parties for Candidate



* = p < .05; † = p < .10. Dependent variable: Respondents' thermometer ratings of the candidate on a 101-point (0 to 100) scale.

Table 5-1. OLS Results for Thermometer Ratings of Mock Candidate, All Occupations Treatments

Experimental Treatments	(1)	(2)
Background	1.92†	
	(1.45)	
Doctor		2.92†
		(1.90)
Politician		0.47
		(1.91)
Both		2.32
		(1.87)
Businessman		2.30
		(1.79)
Democratic Candidate	-6.43**	-6.75**
	(2.68)	(2.69)
Republican Candidate	-4.79*	-5.12*
	(2.55)	(2.56)
Respondent Characteristics		
Same Party as Candidate	2.25	2.54
	(2.57)	(2.59)
Opposite Party as Candidate	-0.43	-0.17
	(2.51)	(2.52)
Issue Handling Advantage	8.84***	8.82***
	(2.01)	(2.02)
Health Care Issue Distance	-3.83***	-3.81***
	(0.27)	(0.27)
Constant	64.96***	64.95***
	(1.65)	(1.65)
R^2	0.2344	0.2365
Root MSE	18.01	18.01
Observations	926	926

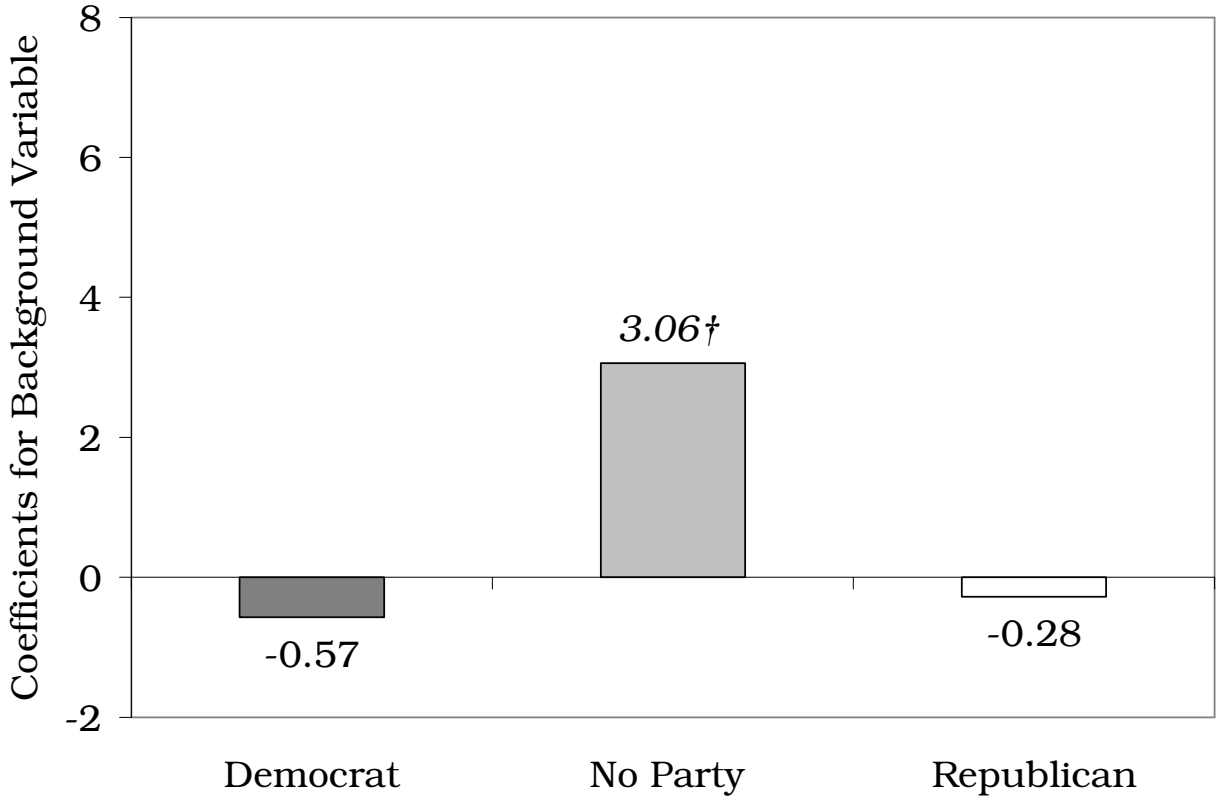
Standard errors in parentheses; One-tailed test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
Dependent variable: Respondents' thermometer ratings of the candidate on a 101-point 0 to 100 scale.

Table 5-2. OLS Results for Sincerity Ratings of Hypothetical Candidate

	Sincerity		Effectiveness	
Experimental Treatments	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Background	0.12		0.36*	
	(0.18)		(0.17)	
Doctor		0.12		0.57**
		(0.23)		(0.22)
Politician		0.16		0.58*
		(0.23)		(0.22)
Both		0.24		0.38*
		(0.23)		(0.22)
Businessman		-0.01		0.00
		(0.22)		(0.21)
Democratic Candidate	-0.78**	-0.76**	-0.46†	-0.39
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Republican Candidate	-1.01**	-0.99**	-.46†	-0.36
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Respondent Traits				
Same Party as Candidate	0.69*	0.67*	0.05	-0.02
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)
Opposite Party as Candidate	0.48†	0.46†	0.05	-0.02
	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.28)
Issue Handling Advantage	0.70**	0.71***	1.02***	1.03***
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Health Care Issue Distance	-0.26***	-0.26***	-0.42***	-0.42***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Constant	6.31***	6.31***	5.06***	5.06***
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)
R^2	0.0996	0.1009	0.1974	0.2051
Root MSE	2.21	2.21	2.15	2.15
Observations	947	947	945	945

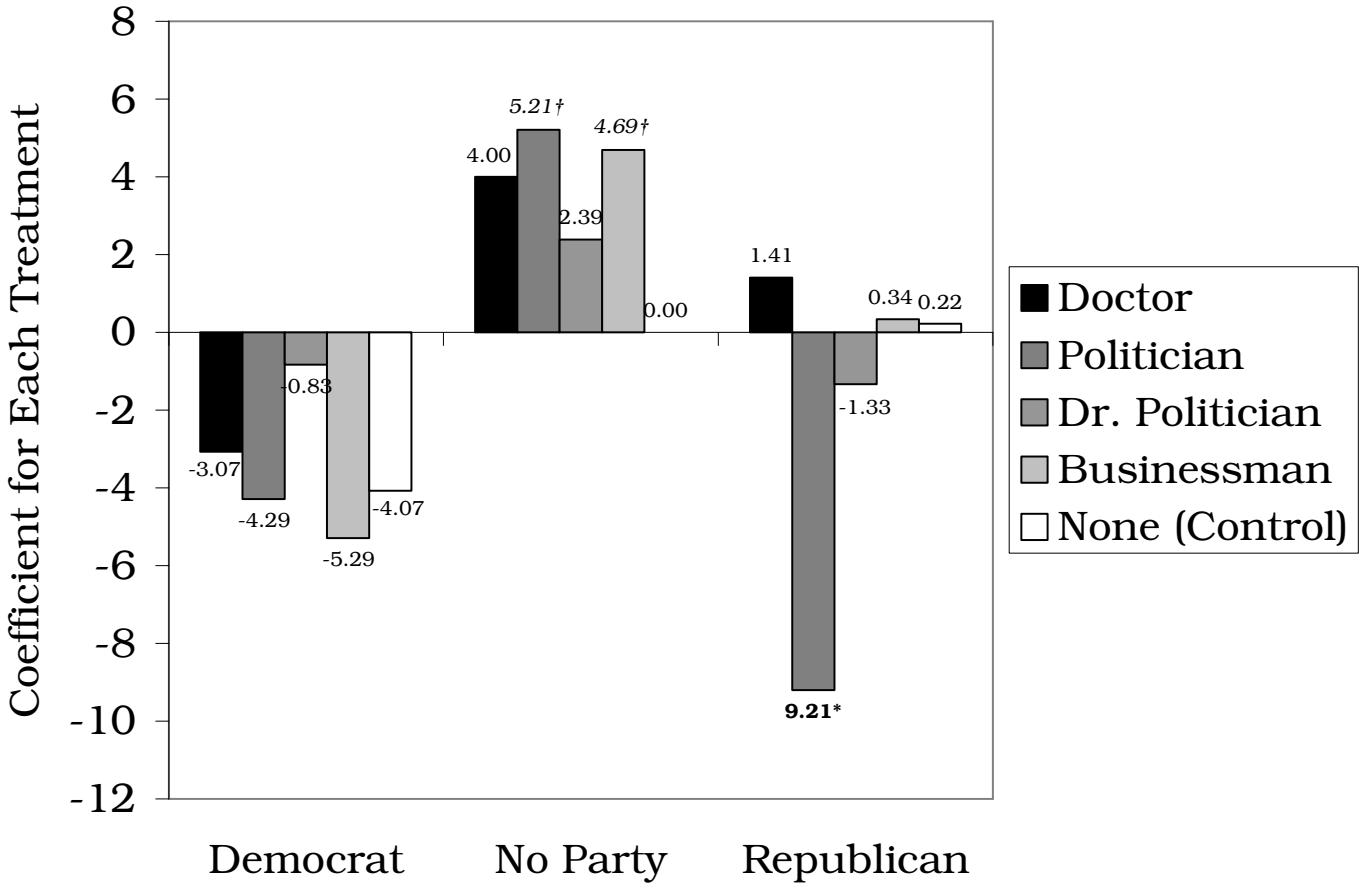
Standard errors in parentheses; One-tailed test * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Dependent variable: Respondents perceptions of the candidate's sincerity or effectiveness on an 11-point 0 to 10 scale

Figure 5-6. Value of *Background* Coefficient in Models Separated by Each Party Treatment



Note: n for Democrat = 269, n for No Party = 290, n for Republican = 290; * = p < .05; † = p < .10. Background Variable combines the four occupational treatments. Each model is a split sample; Only those in the Democrat treatment are in the Democrat model, etc. Dependent variable: Respondents' Thermometer Ratings of the Candidate on a 101-point (0 to 1000 scale. Other independent variables include Party Identification (7 point scale), Issue Handling Advantage, and Health Care Issue Distance (see Table A5-5 for full results).

Figure 5-7. Value of Coefficients for Each Experimental Treatment Group



Note: n = 926; * = p < .05; † = p < .10. Dependent variable: Respondents' thermometer ratings of the candidate on a 101-point 0 to 100 scale. Other independent variables are the same as the Respondent Traits in Table 5-1.

Appendix 1—Appendix Tables

Table A4-1. Multinomial Logit Model of Specificity for Verbs Used in Background Appeals, Senate Elections 2000 & 2002

	Non-Specific Action	Specific Action	Specific Lead Role
Competitiveness	-.001*** (.000)	.002*** (.000)	.023*** (.001)
Incumbent	-.667*** (.008)	-.418*** (.010)	.060*** (.013)
Challenger	-.573*** (.009)	-.081*** (.010)	-.139*** (.016)
Opponent's Record Mentioned	-.335*** (.009)	.871*** (.010)	-.644*** (.018)
Both Candidates' Records Mentioned	-.698*** (.010)	.172*** (.011)	-.055*** (.014)
Republican	-.264*** (.007)	-.158*** (.008)	-.025* (.011)
Year 2000	.975*** (.008)	1.032*** (.009)	1.450*** (.012)
Constant	1.852*** (.028)	-.059 (.037)	-3.325*** (.057)
Psuedo R^2	.0449		
Log-likelihood	-877609.1		

N = 827,154
Base Category is "Candidate as Object"
Robust Standard errors in parentheses
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table A4-2. Multinomial Logit Model of Specificity for Objects Used in Record Appeals, Senate Elections 2000 & 2002

	Personal	Policy Concept	Specific Policy	Specific Bill
Competitiveness	-.010*** (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.005*** (.000)	-.009*** (.001)
Incumbent	-.323*** (.014)	.354*** (.010)	.512*** (.014)	.808*** (.017)
Challenger	-.389*** (.015)	.011 (.015)	.125*** (.016)	.476*** (.018)
Opponent's Record Mentioned	-.220*** (.018)	.390*** (.017)	1.353*** (.018)	.930*** (.020)
Both Candidates' Records Mentioned	.649*** (.023)	.987*** (.023)	1.572*** (.023)	1.577*** (.025)
Republican	.221*** (.012)	.310*** (.012)	.179*** (.012)	.482*** (.014)
Year 2000	-.617*** (.013)	-.552*** (.012)	-.113*** (.013)	-.021 (.014)
Constant	3.006*** (.040)	1.932*** (.039)	1.327*** (.042)	.332*** (.046)
Psuedo R^2	.0345			
Log-likelihood	-1113370.4			

N = 827,154
Base Category is "No Object"
Robust Standard errors in parentheses
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table A4-3. Predicted Probabilities for Verb Models, Different Clustering Models, Calculated by Clarify.

	Candidate as Object Clustered by:			**Non-Specific Action** Clustered by:			**Specific Action** Clustered by:			**Specific Lead Action** Clustered by:		
	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign
Competitiveness												
Mean – 1 SD	.1470	.1470	.1471	.5964	.5963	.5938	.2148	.2148	.2162	.0418	.0418	.0428
Mean	.1484	.1484	.1488	.5897	.5897	.5879	.2094	.2094	.2104	.0524	.0524	.0529
Mean + 1 SD	.1495	.1495	.1501	.5815	.5815	.5785	.2036	.2036	.2048	.0653	.0653	.0667
Candidate Status												
Incumbent	.1755	.1756	.1762	.5544	.5535	.5511	.2014	.2023	.2032	.0687	.0685	.0695
Open Seat	.1146	.1164	.1156	.6508	.6472	.6455	.1933	.1928	.1951	.0411	.0435	.0437
Challenger	.1621	.1623	.1653	.5495	.5475	.5463	.2398	.2408	.2394	.0484	.0500	.0490
By Candidate Mentioned												
Sponsor Only	.1681	.1681	.1705	.6001	.6001	.5972	.1793	.1793	.1791	.0524	.0524	.0531
Both	.1574	.1575	.1634	.3962	.3963	.3915	.3689	.3689	.3671	.0773	.0774	.0780
Opponent Only	.1191	.1191	.1255	.4276	.4276	.4227	.4338	.4338	.4299	.0193	.0194	.0218

Table A4-4. Predicted Probabilities for Object Models, Different Clustering Models, Calculated by Clarify.

	Personal Clustered by:			**Policy Concept** Clustered by:			**Specific Policy** Clustered by:			**Specific Bill** Clustered by:		
	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign	None	Ad	Campaign
Competitiveness												
Mean – 1 SD	.2720	..2718	.2716	.3822	.3805	.3807	.2289	.2284	.2287	.0791	.0808	.0804
Mean	.2628	.2626	.2624	.3930	.3921	.3926	.2303	.2302	.2299	.0743	.0750	.0752
Mean + 1 SD	.2537	.2536	.2533	.4037	.4024	.4030	.2315	.2318	.2308	.0698	.0702	.0710
Candidate Status												
Incumbent	.2105	.2106	.2118	.3936	.3920	.3915	.2683	.2679	.2674	.0943	.0951	.0958
Open Seat	.3446	.3435	.3422	.3691	.3664	.3655	.1925	.1917	.1925	.0516	.0543	.0547
Challenger	.2385	.2379	.2365	.4081	.4052	.4080	.2264	.2270	.2251	.0831	.0849	.0857
By Candidate Mentioned												
Sponsor Only	.2924	.2910	.2892	.3998	.3969	.3997	.1810	.1824	.1805	.0672	.0691	.0702
Both	.1467	.1490	.1408	.4271	.4196	.4227	.3154	.3107	.3095	.0998	.1045	.1053
Opponent Only	.1343	.1369	.1352	.3517	.3447	.3474	.3413	.3361	.3360	.1361	.1441	.1428

Table A5-1. Text of Experimental Manipulations

	Text
Constant	My number one goal: Improve Our Health Care A message to voters from Sam Kelley: My health care plan calls for a real Patient's Bill of Rights. • Make health care more accessible for all • Put doctors and patients in charge of their health care decisions • Guarantee patients the right to see a doctor of their choice, even if that doctor is a specialists • End regulations that make buying health care too difficult Allow individuals to buy the best coverage they can find anywhere in the country
Doctor	I've spent the last 15 years working for you as a ***doctor and surgeon*** at Memorial St. Joseph's Hospital. I know ***first hand*** what quality and affordable health care means to our families. And I will ***never forget*** that in Washington.
Politician	In the ***state legislature***, I fought for and passed the Patient's Bill of Rights Act of 2004. It guarantees that patients can see the doctor of their choice. I've ***fought hard*** here to provide quality and affordable health care to our families. And ***I'll fight just as hard*** for them in Washington.
CEO	As a ***small business owner***, I know first hand how far the cost of health care has skyrocketed. And how hard it is for families to afford health care. I'll take my experience and commitment to Washington to make sure that all our families can get the ***quality and affordable health care*** they need.
Both	I've worked every day for last 15 years to provide health care for our families. As a ***physician and surgeon*** at Memorial St. Joseph's Hospital, I know what quality and affordable health care means to our families. I brought that commitment to the ***State Capitol***, where I passed the Patient's Bill of Rights Act of 2004. It guarantees that patients can see the doctor of their choice. I know first hand what ***quality and affordable health care*** means to our families. That's why I've fought so hard for health care at the State Capitol, and why I'll fight just as hard for it in Washington.
None	No text.
Conclusion (Constant)	For too long we have waited for politicians in Washington to fix our health care system, and for too long, no fix has come. I will wait no longer, and that's why I'm running for Congress." s/ Sam Kelley

Table A5-2. Ratings for Each of the 15 Experimental Cells.

	Doctor	Politician	Dr. Politician	CEO	None (Control)
Democrat					
Thermometer	56.8	54.3	56.1	55.6	55.9
Sincerity	6.14	6.12	5.85	5.57	5.61
Effectiveness	4.69	4.62	4.43	4.00	4.37
N	(64)	(55)	(61)	(74)	(51)
No Party					
Thermometer	58.2	57.2	56.8	59.4	52.7
Sincerity	5.41	5.71	5.82	5.89	5.93
Effectiveness	4.49	4.46	4.23	4.28	4.18
N	(59)	(67)	(65)	(66)	(74)
Republican					
Thermometer	57.4	48.4	52.6	57.2	55.5
Sincerity	5.61	5.27	5.66	5.38	5.35
Effectiveness	4.61	4.38	4.53	3.92	3.7
N	(52)	(46)	(62)	(82)	(81)

Table A5-3. Ratings for Occupation, Across All Party Treatments

	Doctor	Politician	Dr. Politician	CEO	None (Control)
Thermometer	57.4	53.8	55.2	57.3	54.6
Sincerity	5.73	5.72	5.77	5.59	5.62
Effectiveness	4.60	4.49	4.39	4.05	4.04
N	175	168	188	222	206

Table A5-4. Ratings for Party, Across all Occupational Treatments

	Democrat	No Party	Republican
Thermometer	55.8	56.6	54.6
Sincerity	5.86	5.77	5.45
Effectiveness	4.41	4.29	4.16
N	305	331	323

Table A5-5. Thermometer Rating Models, Separated by Candidate's Party Affiliation (see Figure 5-6)

	Democrat	No Party	Republican
Background	-0.57	3.06†	-0.28
	(2.86)	(2.36)	(2.32)
Party Identification	-1.96**	-1.15**	0.07
	(0.70)	(0.46)	(0.54)
Issue Handling Advantage	9.97***	--	3.02
	(2.98)		(2.81)
Health Care Issue Distance	-3.64***	-3.67***	-3.65***
	(0.50)	(0.46)	(0.45)
Constant	68.63***	68.40***	63.32***
	(4.74)	(4.94)	(3.03)
R^2	.3616	.2140	.1865
Root MSE	18.25	17.28	17.45
Observations	290	315	306

Standard errors in parentheses; One-tailed test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
Dependent variable: Respondents' thermometer ratings of the candidate on a 101-point 0 to 100 scale.

Table A5-6. Descriptive Data for Independent Variables

	(%)
Party Identification	
Strong Democrat	16.2
Democrat	11.5
Lean Democrat	14.9
True Independent	10.7
Lean Republican	11.8
Republican	12.7
Strong Republican	20.9
Same Party as Candidate	20.2
Opposite Party as Candidate	20.2
	(%)
Issue Handling—Health Care	
Democrat	47.1
Republican	23.0
Neither	4.4
Both	5.0
Health Care Issue Distance	
Mean	2.41
Median	2
Standard Deviation	2.21

Appendix 2--Coding Rules for Television Advertisements

Part 1. Coding for Record Usage

Record Mention — 1 if the advertisement at any point discusses the record of the sponsoring candidate
0 otherwise

Record is defined as the experience and background of the candidate. Thus, it can include actions taken by a politician while in office (votes taken, programs sponsored), in the private sector (jobs held, accomplishments), and the biographical record of a candidate (type of place where raised, education).

As Incumbent: — 1 if the advertisement mentions the record of the sponsoring candidate in the office they currently hold and are seeking re-election to
0 otherwise

In Politics: — 1 if the advertisement mentions the record of the sponsoring candidate in a political office other than the one he/she is seeking
0 otherwise

In Private Sector: — 1 if the advertisement mentions the record of the sponsoring candidate in a private sector job he/she has held as an adult
0 otherwise

General Appeal: — 1 if the advertisement makes a general and non-specific appeal about the experience of the sponsoring candidate
0 otherwise

Biography/Childhood — 1 if the advertisement discusses any biographical information about the sponsoring candidate, or discusses circumstances of his/her childhood and/or education
0 otherwise

n.b. If "Record Mentioned" is coded 1, then at least one of the previous five categories must be coded 1. Also, more than one of the five sub-categories can be coded 1 for the same advertisement.

Opp Record: — 1 if the advertisement discusses at any point the record of the opposing candidate
0 otherwise

Opp as Incumbent: 1 if the advertisement discusses the record of the opposing candidate while that opposing candidate served in the office he/she is now seeking re-election to
0 otherwise

Opp as Politician: 1 if the advertisement discusses the record of the opposing candidate in a political office other than the one he/she is seeking

Opp in Private Sector: 1 if the advertisement discusses the record of the opposing candidate in a private sector job he/she has held as an adult
0 otherwise

Part 2. Coding for Phrases

Total Phrases: The total number of phrases of dialogue in the advertisement

A phrase can be one of two things: 1) a clause, including a verb, or 2) the mention of an issue position

Phrases on Record: The number of phrases that discuss the record of the candidate.

Appendix 3—Texas Module, 2006 CCES

University of Texas Module, Pre-Election Survey—Cooperative Congressional Elections Study, 2006

This survey contains the questions used for the experiment discussed in Chapter 5. I include the entire survey to allow readers to assess if any of the previous questions might have biased respondents to my questions.

The UT module followed the pre-election common content questionnaire. Those questions are available at http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/material/CCES_Common_Content_August_15_2006_final.pdf.

Q1. While most of us would agree that voting is a good thing, there are lots of things that can happen to prevent someone from voting in a specific election. Given this, please use a 0-100 scale to indicate how likely you are to vote in the congressional elections this November. 100 represents certain to vote, 0 represents certain to NOT vote, and 50 represents equally likely to vote or not vote.

_____ (0-100)

For each of the following people, please use an A-F scale to grade how you think they would do as president of the United States. If you are not familiar enough with the person, please feel free to say so.

[RANDOMIZE Q2-Q7]

Q2. John McCain

A	B	C	D	F	Don't know

Q3. Hillary Clinton

A	B	C	D	F	Don't know

Q4. Ted Kennedy

A	B	C	D	F	Don't know

Q5. Ralph Nader

A	B	C	D	F	Don't know

Q6. Jeb Bush

A B C D F Don't know

Q7. Colin Powell
A B C D F Don't know

Q8. Which of the following presidential candidates would you be more likely to support:

Candidate A has twice been elected to high office in his home state, but has never served in Washington, D.C. He has a reputation of doing things his own way and sometimes angers members of both parties.

Candidate B has 20 years of experience as a congressman and a cabinet secretary. He has a reputation of effectively representing his party and getting things done even on tough issues.

[RANDOMIZE PLACEMENT OF Q9-Q10]

Q9. {**Randomize between two versions**}

{Version 1} *How do you feel about the following statement: "Generally speaking, the federal government is competent."*

{Version 2} *How do you feel about the following statement: "Generally speaking, the federal government is not competent."*

1. Strongly agree.
2. Somewhat agree.
3. Somewhat disagree.
4. Strongly disagree.
5. Don't know.

Q10. {**Randomize between two versions**}

{Version 1} *How do you feel about the following statement: "Generally speaking, the federal government is bought and sold by special interests.*

{Version 2} *How do you feel about the following statement: "Generally speaking, the federal government is not bought and sold by special interests."*

1. Strongly agree.
2. Somewhat agree.
3. Somewhat disagree.
4. Strongly disagree.
5. Don't know.

[RANDOMIZE PLACEMENT OF Q11-Q16]

Please tell us which political party you think would do a better job handling each of the following issues:

Q11. The economy.

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

Q12. National security

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

Q13. Social security

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

Q14. Health care

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

Q15. The federal budget deficit

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

Q16. Crime

Democrats Republicans Neither Both Don't know

We're interested in finding out how people react to some of the advertising that campaigns do. Following this is a direct mail piece from a congressional campaign for you to consider.

[RANDOMIZE EXPOSURE TO ONE OF FIFTEEN MANIPULATIONS]

Q17. Now that you've read the flier from Sam Kelley's campaign, I'd like to get your feelings about him. Please rate Sam Kelley on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. A rating above 50 means that you feel favorably towards him. A rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorably towards him. A rating of 50 means you feel neither favorably nor unfavorably towards him. Feel free to use any number on the scale.

(0-100) {**widget**}

Q18. How certain are you of this rating?

Very Certain Pretty Certain Somewhat Certain Not Very Certain

Q19. Look at the scale below. Some people think the federal government should spend far less on health care in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are at one end of the scale, at point 0. Other people feel it is important for the government to spend far more money on health care, even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 10. And of course, some people believe we should keep health care spending at current levels. Suppose these people are in the middle, at point 5.

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or have you not thought much about this?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spend Far Less on Health Care					Keep Health Care Spending At Current Levels					Spend Much More on Health Care

Q20. Where you would place Sam Kelley on this scale

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spend Far Less on Health Care					Keep Health Care Spending At the Same Level					Spend Much More on Health Care

Q21. How certain are you of Kelley's position?

Very Certain Pretty Certain Somewhat Certain Not Very Certain

Q22. Sam Kelley says "My health care plan calls for a real Patient's Bill of Rights." Using a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 meaning extremely sincere and 0 meaning not at all sincere, how sincere do you think his statement is?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not sincere at all					neutral					extremely sincere

Q23. Sam Kelley says "I will wait no longer" when it comes to fixing our nation's health care system. Using a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 meaning extremely effective and 0 meaning not effective at all, how effective do you think he will be in reforming our nation's health care system if he's elected to Congress?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not effective at all					neutral					extremely effective

Q24. How many days in the past week did you watch a 24 hour cable news channel, such as CNN, Fox News Channel or MSNBC?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q 25. ***{ask only if (23) is >0}*** *Which of the cable news networks would you say you watch most often? {RANDOMIZE ORDER; ALWAYS LIST OTHER LAST}*

FOX
CNN
MSNBC
Other (specify) _____

Q 26. How many days in the past week did you read a daily newspaper?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q27. **{ask only if (25) is >0}** What newspaper did you read most in the past week? (Please be as specific as possible) _____ {open-ended}

Q28. How many days in the past week did you listen to radio shows that invite listeners to call in to discuss current events, public issues or politics?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q29. ***{ask only if (27)>0}*** *Which political talk radio hosts or radio programs did you listen to in the past week?* _____, _____, _____ {limit to 3 responses}

Q30. How many days in the past week did you access information about politics online?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q31. {**ask only if (29)>0}** During the past week, which web sites did you access to get information about politics?_____ _____, _____, _____ {limit 3 responses}

<u>Cable News</u>

RANDOMIZE BETWEEN ASKING Q31-Q34 first, and Q35-38.

{ask ALL} Thinking about the Fox Cable News Channel, please indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 whether you think that FOX News:

RANDOMIZE Q31-34

Q32 Is fair or unfair.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Is Unfair										Is Fair

Q33 Tells the whole story, or doesn't tell the whole story.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does Not Tell The Whole Story										Tells the Whole Story

Q34 Is accurate, or is inaccurate.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Is Inaccurate										Is Accurate

Q35 Can be trusted, or cannot be trusted

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Can be trusted										Cannot be trusted

{**ask ALL**} Thinking about the cable news channel CNN, please indicate whether you think that CNN:

RANDOMIZE Q35-38

Q36 Is fair or unfair.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Is Unfair										Is Fair

Q37 Tells the whole story, or doesn't tell the whole story.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Does Not Tell The Whole Story										Tells the Whole Story

Q38 Is accurate, or is inaccurate.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Is Inaccurate										Is Accurate

Q39 Can be trusted, or cannot be trusted

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Can be trusted Cannot be trusted

Q H40ow many days in the past week did you watch local TV news—for example, "Eyewitness News" or "Action News"?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q41 **{ask only if (39)=yes}** Have you ever visited your local news station's web site?
Yes
No

Q42. ***{ask only if (40)=yes}*** *People visit their local news station's web site for a number of reasons. Why did you visit the website? Did you visit to get information about … (please check all that apply) {RANDOMIZE RESONSES, ALWAYS LIST OTHER LAST}*

Politics
Health
Weather
Sports
Community events
Other (specify) _____

{**All Read Prompt}** *When it comes to politics, some people think of themselves as having an interest or belonging to a group beyond a political party, be it social, racial, ethnic, class, etc. Thinking in these terms…*

Q43. Do you think state legislators should take interests besides partisanship into account when redrawing Congressional district lines?

Yes No

Q44.Would you want legislators to take other interests into account even if it hurt your party?

Yes No

Q45. Which of the following are the two most important ways of achieving the interests of your group?

[RANDOMIZE CHOICE ORDER]

Voting

Social protest
Contacting your representatives
Joining a social/political organization
Having a powerful representative
Volunteering in the community

Q46. How much attention do you pay to redistricting debates in your state, or media stories about redistricting debates in other states?

A lot Some Not very much None at all

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